

# THE GOSPEL IN EXPERIENCE

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

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## PREFACE

FOR some time I have felt in my work of training African Ordinands and teachers the need for a simple but systematic book on Christian Doctrine; and there must be others who could profitably use such a book, but who would not want to study the larger standard works. That need I have tried to supply in this book. For such students the basis of doctrine should be the Creeds rather than the Thirty-Nine Articles or other similar formularies, which, valuable as they are, reflect largely the controversies of the sixteenth century, and do not, therefore, quite answer the needs of the younger Churches.

Some of the most important practical questions in doctrine affecting these Churches at the present time are centred in the proposals for Reunion, and therefore, in the chapters dealing with the Church, the problems connected with Reunion are possibly more prominent than would otherwise seem right. The need for Reunion in the Mission Field is great, and therefore it is all the more necessary that we should try to understand the issues involved, so that we can build the Church wisely. There are at present several proposals for Church Union under consideration, and while it will take time before they can come into effect, I have hopes that this book will be of use to a wider circle than the Anglican Church. That hope has in some ways influenced my thoughts as I have written.

This book has been written in the midst of other work, and therefore I have not consulted other works in writing it, though I do not claim that any of the ideas are original and no doubt the influence of other works will be easily



recognised by those who have read them. Probably the influence of E. J. Bicknell's *Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles* can be seen in much that I have written, as I have used that book very largely in my doctrine lessons, though I have not consulted it in writing this book.

More advanced students, who may happen to read this book, will feel that sometimes statements are made without qualification which seem to ignore other opinions which are rightly held. To have discussed such opinions would usually have taken the argument too far out of its course, and I can only say that the opinions expressed represent the conclusions to which I would have come at the end of a more or less lengthy treatment had I been writing for those who are familiar with these advanced matters in theology. For those who need such a book as this I think such qualifications would generally be irritating, and very often misleading. To have qualified the statements in the interests of academic accuracy would have clouded the beginner's mind, and very little would have been gained.

I would like to express my gratitude to my brother, the Rev. G. E. Childs, for many suggestions and for seeing the book through the press. I must further acknowledge my great debt to my wife, who has helped me with suggestions and criticisms on almost every page, except the index, and so has helped to remove many faults which would otherwise have been left.

—S.H.C.

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## METHOD OF STUDY

THE reader is not assumed to have any other books available beyond the Bible, preferably the Revised Version, and a simple Concordance, such as the *Oxford Helps to the Study of the Bible*. Any other books he may have will be useful, especially one of the standard Dictionaries of the Bible, and a good commentary on some book of the Bible.

Because it is essential that the study of doctrine should be very closely connected with one's devotional life, before each chapter an Act of Devotion is printed. The reader should constantly translate his reading and thought into prayer.

If the reader is dealing with this subject for the first time, he would do well to leave Chapters II to IV till the end, as they must be the most difficult in any such study. They are kept in their present position, as that seems the more logical order.

At the end of each chapter there are suggestions for further study; these might be used either privately or in a group. It is, of course, unnecessary to try to deal with them all, and some of the questions would need further help than is given in this book; but they may suggest subjects to be looked up in other books.

Lastly, the reader is advised to test all that has been written or what he thinks by his own experience, and by the lives of others. In this matter some useful exercises can be found in applying these ideas to any biographies or novels he may read.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Lord, I believe in Thee, help Thou mine unbelief;  
I love Thee, yet not with a perfect heart as I would;  
I long for Thee, yet not with my full strength;  
I trust in Thee, yet not with my whole mind.  
Accept my faith, my love, my longing to know and serve Thee,  
My trust in Thy power to keep me.  
What is cold, do Thou kindle;  
What is lacking, do Thou make up.  
I wait for Thy blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*—Acts of Devotion*

ONE of the most characteristic features of man is his power to think, and to want to know and understand the things around him and the meaning of his experience. At first men made guesses, and generally gave their explanations through stories; and everywhere we find fables and folk-stories telling why certain things happen in nature, such as why it thunders, or how certain things like fire were first introduced, or how wickedness came into the world (*cp.* Pandora's box). While men are still in this stage they acquire a great deal of information about the facts, but the explanations are not really satisfactory, and so gradually these stories give way to more careful and accurate explanations, and we find the beginnings of science, history and theology. Christian doctrine begins in the same way with the information gained through the life-stories of men, and then we collect that information together and try to find the explanation. In our study of Christian doctrine we are trying to understand our experience of God and Jesus Christ, and of our own lives, and what that experience means, and why it is that God works in particular ways. As we learn more and



more to understand this, we can go forward in our own life with God, and we can help others better in their difficulties to find the peace and power of God.

If, then, we are to understand Christian doctrine at all adequately, we must first have the Christian experience, and no one who has not yet known God revealed to him in Jesus Christ can fully understand our doctrine; that is one of the reasons why people so often make mistakes when they are talking about it. It is as we are trying to do God's will that we are enabled to understand the doctrine. Our experience comes first, and our doctrine is only the attempt to explain that experience; sometimes our explanation is inadequate or even wrong, but that does not destroy the truth of our experience. And if we hear teaching which is contrary to our experience, we can be sure it is wrong, even though perhaps we may not be able to see why it is wrong.

Just because we are trying to understand through our experience, we need not be surprised if we find that some people have different explanations from ours. Their experience is different, their characters are different, and so it is not surprising if everyone does not understand everything in quite the same way. We must not think that they are enemies of the truth, but that they have something to teach us; probably they see some things more clearly than we do because of the difference in their experience, and their teaching can correct some of our mistakes, and we may hope that in turn we can give them something which otherwise they would not have.

While, however, we must be generous in our attitude to other people, we must not fall into the opposite error of thinking that it does not matter what a man believes. Eventually right thinking leads to right living, and wrong thinking to wrong living. As we shall see, some of the teachers in the past have been condemned as heretics

because their teaching really would have destroyed the Christian faith, though they themselves did not realise it; so today there are many such false ideas. We must always try to find out what is the truth, and to preserve the truth as far as we are able. We may well regret many of the things which have been done and said in the disputes about our religion, but there were really important matters behind those controversies; and while, perhaps, we should not express them in quite the same ways, the differences still very largely exist, and we have to make up our minds about them.

This work of trying to understand and explain our experience is far from being easy, and often when men have tried to do so they have made mistakes. And so, sometimes because of laziness and often because of the fear of making mistakes, people have wanted to be told what they must believe, so that they should not have to do their own thinking, but could just take what they were told. We find, however, that there is no authority which can give such guidance. In the Middle Ages men said that the Church could give such guidance, and there are still some who say so, but as soon as we ask, What is the Church? or What does the Church teach? we find there is no one answer, and we are still left in doubt about what we are to believe. After the Reformation many people tried to put the Bible in the place of the Church, and said the Bible was the one infallible authority; but, again, as soon as we try to find what is the teaching of the Bible on any particular point, we find the most diverse interpretations, and the theory could only be upheld if there were an infallible interpreter. It is very noticeable that it was just such authority that our Lord and His Apostles avoided using, and when we try to make them into such authorities we find that they do not give us what we want.

God has given us the faculty of our reason to discover and to test truth, and it is only by using our reason that we are able to find the truth. Our reason may be defective, but we have no other power, just as we have no other power of judging the beauty of music except by our hearing; and if we are deaf, we are incapable of judging the beauty of sound. But all our senses can be trained. Our hearing may be trained, so that we learn to hear things which we did not before, and to appreciate things which we did not before; and the chief way we do so train ourselves is by submitting ourselves to authorities who can point out what we should hear. So, too, we need to train our reason, and the Bible, the Church, our teachers, are all authorities to guide and help us. We may welcome all such authoritative help, but we must not misuse them by trying to make them save us the trouble of doing our own thinking.

It may, however, be objected that the Christian has to walk by faith and not by sight; and that Christianity is primarily a faith. That, indeed, is true, but faith is not contrary to reason. It is true, as we shall see, that there is much which we cannot prove as we can prove the multiplication table; we have to act in faith, going beyond what we can see, but we must use our reason as we go. That is the way that all advance in knowledge is made. The scientist makes an act of faith, that there is a cause for what he sees, and, acting on that faith, he finds his justification. So in life we have to make the start in faith, but our reason can and should help us in the journey, and only so shall we avoid mistakes and disaster. Faith is rather the light by which our reason is enabled to see.

When people do accept without question what they are told on authority, the result is that they accept all kinds of superstition. All the superstitions of heathenism are based on authoritative teaching, and the hearer

is expected to believe what he hears and to ask no question. That cannot be the attitude of the Christian who believes in the God of Truth. We need fear nothing from fuller investigation. Just because we are trying to find out more about God, we may be sure that anything that is true must help us in our task. It is indeed probable that we shall make mistakes, but the way to correct those mistakes is to learn more fully what is the truth. By asking questions, we shall find out where our explanations are faulty, and so we shall be able to learn more. But if we think that we have the full knowledge already, and refuse to ask questions, we cannot advance in knowledge. It is really a lack of faith in God when we will not face our difficulties; an honest answer which takes account of all the facts must confirm our faith, or else our faith is a useless thing which we are better without.

In trying to understand our faith, we shall then use the teaching of the Bible to find out what it was that the first disciples believed, and what it was that our Lord did and taught, and we shall use the experience of the great Christians ever since—that is to say, the Church. We shall see at times where other people have made mistakes, and we shall try to avoid making the same ones. Sometimes, when bad mistakes were made, the Christians showed what was the right path to follow, and that is the chief use of the Creeds. Then summing all these up, we shall try to understand what is the meaning of our faith for us today.

One difficulty in a study like this is that Christian thought is a unity, each part depending on the other. It is not like arithmetic, where each step leads to the next, and so can be learnt in a clear order. We cannot understand the teaching about God without understanding the teaching about man and sin and the Church, and in the earlier chapters of this book much which is explained in

the later chapters will have to be assumed. For this reason it must be remembered that, if one part of the whole body of Christian doctrine is rejected, it may have disastrous consequences for other parts; we must always try to keep in mind the whole.

Often we shall find that there are two truths which we must keep in mind, although they may seem to contradict each other. Many of the difficulties, both of the past and the present, have been caused through concentrating on one truth or the other, whereas it is necessary to keep both in mind. Very possibly we shall not fully understand how the two may be reconciled, and we never shall in this life. It is not necessary that we should understand fully; what is necessary is that we should not ignore any of the facts.

As we try to understand the truth of God and ourselves we often find that we have not really the language to express our ideas, and we have to use pictures which are 'like the truth', though not the whole truth. For example, we may speak about 'the eyes of God being over the righteous', but God has no physical eyes, nor can He properly be said to be over anything, as space does not exist in the being of God. Often in the Bible and in all Christian writings such expressions are used because that is the only way we can talk, but we need to be careful that we do not insist on the pictures so that they become misleading. A map is very useful in telling us about a piece of country we do not know, but we must use it properly—for example, we must not say that all towns are round because they are shown by a round dot. In the same way we must be careful to interpret the signs or pictures of religious language properly, or we shall make just as foolish mistakes.

Lastly, we need to remember that Christianity is a way of life, a method of living, and not merely a theory of



life. It is possible for the humblest believer to live in the Christian way, while the wisest theologian may miss it. Our belief can indeed help us in learning that way, and unless it does that it is useless. The purpose of Christ is that we should know God, and not merely know about Him; and the Christian religion is not to understand God, but to worship Him.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How far does the study of doctrine require a spiritual preparation? (*Cp.* Luke 16:27-31; Matt. 11:25-27; John 5:30-47; 1 Cor. 1:18-31, 2:14-16; 2 Cor. 4:3, 4). Suggest any ways we see this illustrated in the life of our Lord, such as in the Resurrection appearances.

2. Suggest illustrations from Scripture of right differences of doctrine giving a richer unity, and of wrong differences which might have destroyed the faith. Find some similar modern differences.

3. What do we find about the use of authority and reason in the New Testament? (*Cp.* Mark 4:9-12, 8:11-13, 11:27-33; John 14:20-24; 2 Cor. 4:2; 1 Pet. 5:1-3.)

4. Suggest examples of two truths which appear to be mutually contradictory.

5. Give some illustrations of picture language. 'The Jews in using pictures thought of the result rather than the method'. Discuss this. (*Cp.* 'Redeem' [Isa. 52:3], 'Harden' [Exod. 4:21], 'Sell' [1 Kings 21:25], 'Jealous' [Exod. 20:5].)

6. 'The heart has its reasons of which the head knows nothing' (Pascal). Discuss this.

7. In the Bible there is the record of a progressive revelation; show how some ideas are developed in the Old Testament, such as the belief in the Resurrection.

8. Try to answer the question, 'What is the Gospel?'

## CHAPTER II

### THE LIVING GOD

O God, Thou art my God:  
Earnestly will I seek Thee;  
My soul thirsteth for Thee,  
My flesh longeth greatly after Thee,  
In a barren and dry land without water.  
Thy lovingkindness is better than life.  
Because Thou hast been my helper,  
Therefore under the shadow of Thy wings will I  
rejoice.  
My soul cleaveth unto Thee:  
For Thy right hand upholdeth me.

—*Psalm 63*

'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. . . . And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good' (Gen. 1:1, 31). That is the beginning of the Christian revelation, and it is the best beginning for our thoughts about the Christian faith. Men have often tried to prove that God exists, but none of these proofs are really final. They may, indeed, lead us to think that God's existence is probable, but in the end belief in God is an act of faith, a faith which our experience justifies as we act on it.

As the Jews advanced in their religious thought they realised that there could only be one God, and that the nations which had many gods had no real God. So also the best Greek thinkers saw that if there is any reasonable purpose and plan in the world, there could only be one God. Both for our thought and for our religion it is necessary to believe in only one God. There is, however, a temptation in practice to fall away from this fundamental idea—for example, sometimes the Devil is almost

regarded as a second God, and as though he were all but omnipotent; but we must hold firm to the first article of the Creed, 'I believe in one God'.

We need to know more about God if our religious needs are to be satisfied. There have been some people who have said that God must be so much greater than ourselves, and so different from ourselves that we cannot know Him or describe Him. There is, indeed, a danger that we should think of God merely as a big man and limit Him by our ideas; but while we cannot fully understand Him, we may well have some knowledge of Him, which, while not complete, is true as far as it goes. And, further, while we cannot by thinking reach up to God, surely He can reveal Himself to us. This is just what we find in Christian experience He has done, and most especially in Jesus Christ.

The highest mode of existence which we know is personality; that is what distinguishes man from the animals, and makes him the crown of creation, so that the least we can say of God is that He is personal. This accords with our belief that His supreme revelation of Himself was in and through a human personality. No doubt His personality is greater than ours, but He is at least personal, and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity guards us from regarding His personality as being merely like ours. He is personal—living, acting, willing, creating, and loving. This is a fundamental act of faith for the Christian.

God's first revelation of Himself is through the Creation. Often men have been troubled by the pain and evil in the world, and they have felt that such things could not have come from a good God. Sometimes they have said that the world must have been made by some lesser power than God, or even by a bad god. And very often people have said that this material world of ours and our bodies are in themselves bad, and that the best thing we can do



is to try to escape from the world and to free our souls from all the desires of the body. We even find Christians sometimes talking like that. The Bible, however, starts by saying that God created the world, and saw that it was good. This life which we share in the world is in itself good, and though, like other good things, it may be misused, it is the right instrument for accomplishing God's plan. This idea does cause difficulties, and it is not easy, and sometimes impossible, to answer the questions which we naturally and rightly ask; but the faith that this world is good and the best instrument for God's purpose makes all the difference in the way we live our lives and how we think about God.

There is a further difficulty of another kind. People used to think that God suddenly created the world in six days, but now scientists tell us that the world has been in existence millions of years, and most of them at least would say that man has been gradually evolved from lower forms of life. All this may well be true, and as Christians we cannot support or contradict any purely scientific idea; only a better scientist can do that. But while science can tell us a great deal about how God has worked and is still working, it cannot say why God works in that way, or what is His purpose; and that is what matters for the Christian. So science needs God's revelation before it can help us to understand the meaning of life. There are, however, very many Christians who feel that the idea of evolution does help them to understand that God has a purpose in our life, and it helps them to understand why His purposes sometimes seem so long in being fulfilled.

One word we constantly use in the Creeds and in our prayers is 'Almighty'. The first Christians used a better word, the Greek 'Pantocrator', which means all-ruling. When we say that God is almighty, we do not mean

that He can do things which in their nature are impossible, such as altering the rules of arithmetic. Also by His own will and nature He cannot do certain things; thus He cannot sin. When we say that He is almighty, we mean that He rules everything, and that nothing can happen except by His allowing it to happen, and nothing can get beyond his control. Just as it is important for us to believe that God made the world, so it is even more important that we should believe that He controls it. There is also another limit to God's power, which we shall be meeting many times in our study: God has created certain beings, including men, with wills, and therefore God's will is not the only will in the world, and He is limited by these wills when they are opposing Him. This does not mean that we can prevent God's purposes from being fulfilled ultimately, or that we can go beyond His control; but it does mean that we can limit the way God works, or the methods and instruments He can use.

There are two expressions about God which we should try to understand, because they help us to understand His nature. God is transcendent and immanent. First God transcends the world; He is greater than the world, and is, as it were, outside it, as a carpenter is greater than and outside the furniture he makes. God does not need the world to supply anything that is lacking in his nature; He is independent of the world. On the other hand, He is immanent in the world, as a man's thought is immanent in his writings and is incomplete without such expression. All things are in Him, and by Him they exist and continue to exist. Sometimes men have thought only of His transcendence, and they have regarded Him as creating the world, and then leaving it, except occasionally to intervene to put something right by a miracle, just as a man winds up a clock and leaves it, perhaps occasionally altering the position of the hands. But this makes God

so far off that we feel we need some sort of mediator between Him and ourselves, so that religion loses its warm personal touch. Other people have thought only of His immanence in the world, so that everything is equally part of God, both good and evil, a belief which destroys the moral life of the world, and makes God merely 'the soul of things'. We have to keep both sides of the truth in mind: God acts and reveals Himself equally in the miraculous or the unusual and in the usual daily order of things; He is above, outside, and beyond the world, and also in the world and in everything in it.

The most distinctive feature of all in the Christian thought of God is the idea that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). All other aspects of God's nature are the different sides of His love; His mercy and His wrath are alike the expressions of His love. This belief can only come as we see in Christ the perfect revelation of God. Christ always told us to think of God as 'your Father in Heaven'. Sometimes men have thought of Him primarily as the Creator, the King, or the Judge. But the relationship of the subject or the prisoner to the king or the judge is rather impersonal. The relationship of child to father is one of the closest and most personal there can be, and it is such a close personal relationship to Him that God intended us to have. He is love, and when His purposes are frustrated it means that His love is prevented from having its full expression. It is only as we keep this view of God before us that we can hope to understand much of Christian doctrine.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Trace the development in the Old Testament of the idea of the One God. (*Cp.* Judg. 11:24; 1 Sam. 26:19; 1 Kings 18:21, 39; Amos 4:13, 5:8, 9:7; Isa. 40 and 44.)

2. Collect other passages from the Bible describing the Creation—*e.g.*, Ps. 19; Prov. 8:22 *ff.*

3. Discuss the bearing of scientific and historical discoveries on our conception of religion.

4. In the light of the paragraph on the meaning of 'Almighty', how would you interpret such texts as Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6; 1 Kings 22:23? Compare this with Suggestion 5 in Chapter I.

5. God is not only described as omnipotent, but also as omniscient. Would you suggest that there are any limits to His knowledge, as has been suggested to His power?

6. Suggest some texts or lines of hymns which refer to the immanence of God, such as 'In all life Thou livest, the true life of all'.

7. In formal statements of doctrine God is said to be without passions (*impassible*). How would you reconcile this with the truth of His love?

## CHAPTER III

### THE HOLY TRINITY

I bind unto myself today  
The strong Name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three in One and One in Three.  
Of whom all nature hath creation;  
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word.  
Praise to the Lord of our salvation.  
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

—*St Patrick's Breastplate*

WHEN the first Christians went out to preach the Gospel to the world they knew they had a fresh revelation of God. They had found that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). They had been brought up as Jews, and were convinced that there could be only one God. They never doubted that. But they had had a new experience; they were convinced that in Christ they had seen God. He was more than a prophet; they knew in their own experience the truth of the saying, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father' (John 14:9). The experience that they were forgiven men came through Christ Jesus; it was not merely that they followed His teaching, but that His life was reproduced in them and that He had given them life.

As they thought about His teaching there was much that suggested that in some way He was different from other men. He had done God's work in His own name, and in His name they were able also to do those works: 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk' (Acts 3:6). He had spoken chiefly of Himself as 'the Son of Man', which seems to have been a title for the Messiah.

But He had also described Himself as 'the Son' (Matt. 11:27; Mark 13:32), thus claiming a unique relationship with God. He had claimed to forgive sins, and as He forgave, men really felt forgiven, and yet eventually, it is only God who can forgive. He had claimed to be the judge of the world, to be able to give life; He had called the heavy-laden and the weary to Himself that He might give them rest for their souls (Matt. 11:28). These were indeed the works of God alone, and yet when men believed on Him they found these promises fulfilled.

There was yet another factor in the experience of these first Christians; they felt that Christ had not left them at the end of the Ministry, but that they had His presence with them all the time, wherever they went. He had promised to give them the Holy Spirit, and the Christians had received that Spirit, and in the indwelling of the Spirit they were conscious of their union with Christ.

Although these early Christians firmly believed that there is only one God, they were compelled by their experience to treat Christ and the Holy Spirit as God. And while in the New Testament they do not use the expressions of the later Creeds, their experience compelled them to speak of the ideas behind those Creeds. In this connection see St Paul in Col. 1:15-17, St John in the prologue of his Gospel (1:1-18), and the opening of the Epistle to the Hebrews (1:1-14). Notice also the implications of St Paul's greetings, and especially the familiar prayer, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost' (2 Cor. 13:14). All this was the experience of these first disciples, and that experience has been confirmed by Christians ever since. But how are we to explain it? That was almost the first question the Church had to answer, and it is not surprising if some wrong answers were given at first. We shall have to look at some of these wrong



answers, partly to understand what our Creeds do mean, and partly because we are likely to be tempted to make the same mistakes ourselves.

First of all, there were some who tried to explain what had happened in terms of Jewish thought. They said that Jesus was a specially good man on whom at His Baptism had come the power of God. This meant that Jesus was still only one of the prophets who had come to perfect the law. Christianity would only have been a new law; it would not have been a new life. Also, it did not explain how Christians could rightly worship Jesus—the worship of any man, however good, is idolatrous—and yet the Christian experience of Christ forced them to worship Him. So that explanation was not satisfactory, as it did not explain the Christian experience. This type of teaching is known as Adoptionism, or Dynamic Monarchianism.

If Jesus was not merely an inspired man, He must have been in some way divine, and that made other people try to explain Him as being God. But it is very difficult to see how God and man can be joined, and these people fell into the old mistake of thinking that our bodies and the world are evil. So they said that God could not really have become man, but He only seemed to be a man, and He only seemed to suffer and to hang upon the Cross. This idea is called 'Docetism', from the Greek word 'to seem'. If all that men needed to save them was knowledge, as the Greeks often said, then such a Christ would have been sufficient. But we need more than enlightening; we need to be saved. But if Christ were not really man, there could be no real salvation for us who have to live in bodies. Also such a theory did not agree with the facts of the experience of the people who had known Christ. So Docetism again did not explain the facts. No one today would teach Docetism in that form, but we do

often hear ideas about Christ which would mean that He was not really man, and all such ideas are false in the same way.

The Christians were worshipping the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This seemed to many as though they were worshipping three Gods, and quite rightly they felt that would be wrong. So they said there was only one God, but He had revealed Himself in three ways: in the Old Testament He had shown Himself as the Father, in the Gospels as the Son, and in the Christian experience as the Holy Spirit. But while we might know God in these three ways, there was no distinction in God Himself. It was just as we may know a person as a teacher, a citizen, and a friend; there are differences in each such aspect, but he is only one person. There was much that was attractive in this idea, but it did not really fit the facts. While our Lord had said, 'I and My Father are one' (John 10:30), He had, nevertheless, always felt a distinction. Thus He prayed to the Father, and at least once recognised a distinction of will: 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt' (Matt. 26:39). And again He had drawn a distinction between Himself and the Holy Spirit, who was 'another Comforter' (John 14:16) whom He would send. Thus this theory again did not explain all the facts of the Gospel, and so the Church quite rightly rejected it. This theory is known by three names: Modal Monarchianism, which explains it; or Sabellianism, after one of its chief teachers; or Patripassianism, which is really a nickname given by its opponents because it said that the Father suffered on the Cross.

Partly in revolt against this teaching arose the most dangerous heresy the Church has had to face, which is called Arianism. Arius started by insisting on the distinction, and said, since Christ is called 'the Son', 'the firstborn of all creation' (Col. 1:15), He was created by



the Father, and that 'there was once when He was not'. So Christ was a created being, divine, but not God. Arius also taught that at the Incarnation Christ took a human body, but not a human soul. This would have been a very easy doctrine to understand, but it would have destroyed Christianity, for Christ would then have been neither really God nor really man, and so could not have been a true mediator between God and man. Further, if Christ were a created being, no matter how high above men or angels, it would be wrong for us to worship Him.

In order to condemn this teaching it became necessary to use certain words and phrases which are not found in Scripture, and very many for a long time were unwilling to do this. The majority of Christians had been content just to use the words of Scripture, but it became necessary to go beyond them in order to rule out these bad mistakes. We shall now have to look at some of these technical terms, so that we can understand what it was that was decided as the true teaching of the Church.

The Greek philosophers said that everything had its *ousia* which made it what it is. It was the *ousia* which made a certain material wood and not iron. This was different from the qualities which we can know by our senses—*e.g.*, colour—for different things can have the same qualities. Thus both iron and wood can be black, hard, smooth, and so on; but there was this *ousia* which made the one thing wood and the other iron. They also used another word, *hypostasis*, which meant almost the same thing. Arius said that the *ousia* of Christ was like that of the Father, but not the same. Another Greek word we have to notice is *prosopon*, which meant a character in a play, so that an actor could take the *prosopon* or character of some historical person. This was the word the Sabellians had used to describe the three aspects of God, and so orthodox Christians did not like it.

Now we must turn to the Latin words that were used and from which our English terms are derived. Latin had the word 'essence', which is the literal translation of *ousia*, but it was very seldom used. Instead, they used the word 'substance', which is the literal translation of *hypostasis*; but it also had another meaning in law—namely, possessions or property, as in the phrase 'wasted his substance'. Now two people or more could quite easily hold one substance or property; and while the meaning of substance in theology is the philosophic one—what makes a thing what it is, as contrasted with its qualities or accidents—its legal meaning, no doubt, helped its popularity. The Latin had the word 'person' to mean a character in a play, and still we use it in this sense in the familiar phrase 'Dramatis Personæ'. This word also had a legal meaning, the character by which a man could appear in the law court; thus a man might have several 'persons'—*e.g.*, as a private citizen and a Government official; and there were people in Roman law who had no person, such as women and slaves.

When the Church was fighting Arianism it had to make use of these terms, and it said that the Son was of the same *ousia* as the Father, contradicting Arius, who would only say 'of like *ousia*'; but there were three distinctions or *hypostases* in that one *ousia*, thus contradicting the Sabellians, who had also used the phrase 'of the same *ousia*', but had said that there was no reality in the distinctions, but only three *prosopa* or aspects in which God revealed Himself. In this way the Church stated the problem, emphasising the factors which must be remembered—first that God is one and there cannot be a second God, but that in the Godhead there are three eternal distinctions.

In translating this definition into Latin the words were used that there was one substance and three persons. This

was unfortunate, as both words in Latin, and still more in English, had a more material meaning than the Greek ones. At the time they were apt to be misunderstood because they did not correspond to the Greek words, and today both 'substance' and 'person' have very different meanings. We are however, to understand them in the sense of the Greek words. God is one, but in that unity there is an eternal threefold distinction. Possibly we might today use the word 'personality' for person.

It is sometimes objected that we no longer use this idea of substance and accidents, and therefore we ought no longer to use these terms in our theological language. But we have really no better terms at our disposal. Our philosophers are not agreed how to explain reality, and these terms do guard the fundamental facts we have to remember, while they define as little as possible.

In our thought about the Holy Trinity we have to remember what is called the 'Monarchia' of the Father, that He alone is the fount of Godhead, and also what is called the 'co-inherence' of the Trinity—that is, in the act of any one Person of the Trinity all three act. As we think of this doctrine there is much that remains mysterious and perplexing, for we cannot understand fully; but we do not even understand ourselves, so we cannot comprehend the nature of God. The idea of the Trinity does, however, help us to understand more of His nature. His will, His thought, His love all have a fuller meaning; indeed, it is difficult to conceive any real meaning for them if He were a bare unity. (In that case it would seem as if the world were necessary for His own complete life, because apart from the world God would have no object for His love.) It is, further, an ennobling conception to think of the creation as somehow the expression of the eternal love existing between the Three Persons of the Trinity.

The Second Person of the Trinity is described in the New Testament as the Son, or the Logos. The word 'Logos' is used in the prologue of St John's Gospel, and is translated in the English Bible as 'Word'; but it is really impossible to find an adequate English translation, so perhaps it is better to keep the Greek 'Logos'. Our words are the means by which we express ourselves, and so part of the meaning of calling the Second Person of the Trinity the Logos is that His work is the revealing of the mind of God. Another use of words is for reasoning; we can hardly think at all without using words, and so the Logos stands for the Reason of God. Some of the Greek philosophers had talked about the Logos or Reason behind the world from which our reason is derived. The Old Testament writers had often spoken about the Word of God, especially in connection with Creation, and also about the Wisdom of God. In the Old Testament there is no distinction of person meant, but it prepared the way for Christian thought about our Lord. All these ideas are included in the conception of the Logos. One should notice the clause in the Nicene Creed, 'By whom'—that is, through the Logos or the Son—'all things were made'.

We must also notice the phrase 'only-begotten'. All Christian thinkers have agreed that the Father is the only source of Godhead, and in some way the Son and the Holy Spirit are derived from Him. We can hardly imagine what this means, and still less the process by which it takes place. So we use the words which are found in Scripture, but we must not try to push them too far. Scripture several times speaks of our Lord as begotten of the Father, and that is the best word we can use. But probably we are not to think of Him as begotten once for all as a child is begotten once for all by his parents; but rather it is an eternal process, as in one of the most famous illustrations the rays of light are eternally

begotten of the sun. The sun is the source of the rays, but the nature of the sun involves the eternal generation of the rays. So the Father is the source of Godhead, but His nature involves the eternal generation of the Logos.

The Holy Spirit is said to 'proceed from the Father and the Son'. This, again, is keeping as far as possible to the language of Scripture. Always in Scripture He is spoken of as manifested through the Son and interpreting the Son. And this seems to be true not only of the way we know Him, but also of His essential nature. Some of the Greek theologians objected to the phrase of our Nicene Creed, and said that it suggested two sources of Godhead, but it is rather to be understood in the more accurate phrase, 'Who proceedeth from the Father through the Son'. We may perhaps illustrate this by the sun again: the light proceeds from the sun through the rays.

In the Christian revelation the work of the Spirit is connected with the inspiration and the sanctification of men. This is difficult to distinguish from the work of the Logos, though it is not quite the same; but we need not distinguish the work of the Spirit too sharply, for, as we said before, in the action of any one Person of the Trinity the other Persons co-inhere.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. With the help of a concordance trace out the phrase 'the Son of Man' in the Old Testament, and see what use our Lord made of the title.
2. What other titles are used for our Lord? Collect passages using them, and suggest their meaning.
3. Collect passages from the Gospels showing our Lord's claim to be divine.
4. Collect passages from the Epistles teaching the Godhead of our Lord, and also passages of the Old Testament

referring to Jehovah, which are quoted in the New Testament, but applied to Christ.

5. Try to suggest passages from the New Testament which the Docetics, the Sabellians, and the Arians might have used to support their arguments. How would you explain these passages?

6. Explain the meaning of the passage on p. 20, 'The idea of the Trinity does, however, help us . . .' to the end of the paragraph.

7. Suggest passages in the Old Testament and Apocrypha which lead up to the idea of the Logos.

8. Collect passages from the New Testament which refer to the personality of the Spirit.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE INCARNATION

Of the Father's love begotten,  
Ere the worlds began to be,  
He, the Alpha and Omega,  
He the source, the ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see,  
Evermore and evermore.

Praise Him, O ye heaven of heavens;  
Praise Him, angels in the height;  
All ominions bow before Him,  
And exalt His wondrous might;  
Let no tongue of man be silent;  
Let each voice and heart unite,  
Evermore and evermore.

—PRUDENTIUS (Fourth century)

AFTER the fight with Arianism it was clearly decided that Christ was perfect God, but it had yet to be decided how it was possible for 'the Logos to be made flesh' (John 1:14). Again various attempts were made to solve the problem, which failed to explain the facts, and which would have destroyed our faith, and we must now notice some of these attempts.

The first one was made by Apollinarius of Laodicea, and is called Apollinarianism. He said that our Lord could not have taken a human soul, for that would have meant He had a free will, and so would have sinned. He held, therefore, that our Lord only took a human body and mind, but not a human soul. To the objection that this would mean He was not a perfect man Apollinarius replied that the soul was derived from the Logos,

and that therefore He had no need of a human soul, as the Logos took the place of the soul. But if this were so, it would mean that there could be no redemption for our souls, and yet it is our souls which need redemption most. Such a theory must have destroyed the Christian hope, and it was contrary to the Christian experience which knew redemption in the soul. Against this theory the Church insisted that Christ was 'perfect man' as well as 'perfect God'.

Some of the opponents of Apollinarianism fell into the opposite error, which is known as Nestorianism, after the Bishop of the rival Church at Antioch, though Nestorius himself was not actually Nestorian. The teachers of Antioch always insisted on the historical side of Christianity, and therefore put most emphasis on the manhood of our Lord. The Nestorians said that the union was a union of will. Christ was a holy man in whom the Logos dwelt as God may dwell in a temple. Such a union would not have been different in kind from the union of any good man with God. Thus the Nestorians taught that there were two distinct persons in Christ—the Logos and Jesus. But never in the Gospel story are we conscious of two persons in Christ; rather, He was a complete unity in contrast to ourselves, who have constant conflicts in our lives. Had it only been a union of will, the man Jesus would have been distinct from the divine Logos, and no saint can ever identify himself with God as Christ did. Further, His work for men would not have been more than that of a prophet; He could not have redeemed men. The Church against this insisted that in Christ there are the two perfect natures of God and man, but He is only one Person, never to be divided.

Once again in the reaction against Nestorianism another kind of false teaching arose, called Eutychianism, from its chief teacher, Eutyches of Constantinople. He said



that before the Incarnation there were the two natures, Godhead and manhood, but after the Incarnation the manhood was absorbed into the Godhead, as, to use a popular illustration of the time, a drop of vinegar is absorbed in the ocean. This would mean that our Lord's manhood was practically destroyed, serving only as a veil to hide the Godhead. It was really only another form of Docetism.

As in the doctrine of the Trinity, the Church emphasised the factors of the problem which we must remember, but more than that it did not define. The doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation as determined in the early councils, especially Nicæa, Constantinople and Chalcedon, have been repeated in most of the formularies of our Churches—*e.g.*, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Westminster Confession, etc.

In these definitions the Church has insisted that in Christ the two natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were united, but that in the union there is only one Person. This is illustrated in the *Quicumque Vult* by the union in one man of two such unlike things as spirit and body. The Church has always insisted that the manhood of our Lord was complete, so that He shared all our limitations as men, except only that He did not sin. This leads on to one of the most difficult parts in the understanding of the Incarnation: in becoming man the Logos limited Himself by the conditions of manhood. While we must think of the Logos as still performing His ordinary functions in the Godhead, in that part of His work which was included in the Incarnation He emptied Himself, as St Paul says (Phil. 2: 7), to make a real Incarnation possible. It is clear that although Christ was God Incarnate, He did not share in God's omnipresence, and equally clearly there was a limitation of His power. So, too, we find there was a limitation

of His knowledge: 'He advanced in wisdom' as well as in stature (Luke 2:52), and, indeed, He could not have really shared our human life if He had not shared in these limitations. But while we must acknowledge this limitation of Christ's knowledge, the truth of the Incarnation does guarantee that our Lord's revelation of the character, will and purpose of God is true, for that revelation was part of the purpose of the Incarnation.

Sometimes the earlier teachers said that our Lord's manhood was impersonal, because they wished to emphasise that there were not two centres of personality in Him, but that He was one Person, and His personality was continuous with that of the Logos. This is an important truth to keep in mind, but the expression may be misleading. Orthodox teachers have always taught that our Lord had a human will, and today we would regard the possession of will as the most important part of personality. But we must always think of Him as one Person, and that the centre of His personality is the same as that of the Logos.

When we are thinking about this doctrine there is a danger of saying that when our Lord was hungry, or tired, or even when He wept, He showed His manhood, and when He healed diseases or fed the multitude He showed His Godhead. But that is really dividing the Christ; it is making Him two persons. Always, both in His weakness and in His power, we must see the one Christ, both God and man; always He is the manifestation of God in the person of man. 'Jesus, divinest when Thou most art man'.

Another important truth we have to bear in mind is that Christ is still God and man; the Incarnation did not cease when our Lord returned to the Father at the Ascension. He is still the perfect man, and it is by His manhood taken up into the Godhead that He is our great

High Priest, who 'ever liveth to make intercession' for us (Heb. 7: 25).

When speaking of our Lord's manhood, theologians have usually preferred to say that He was Man rather than a man. We are not to think of Him as an individual man so much as summing up all manhood into Himself. His offering of Himself was not merely the offering of an individual man, but the offering of mankind as a whole, and His victory over sin was man's victory. At the Incarnation Christ took up manhood into God, and by that act effected our union with God. It is this side of the Incarnation which brings us the hope and assurance that we share in the life of Christ, and that we can be found in Him.

The doctrine of the Incarnation is closely connected with the Virgin Birth of our Lord. We need not now examine the historical or scientific evidence, as our purpose is with doctrine. Suffice it to say that the historical evidence is so strong that if we reject the idea of a miraculous conception we must do so on other grounds, while at least science cannot preclude the possibility. It is impossible to say that the Incarnation *must* have taken place in this way, and for most people today belief in the Virgin Birth follows the conviction that Jesus was the Word made flesh. The Virgin Birth does not prove the Incarnation, but it is congruous with it. In the Incarnation God did something new in the life of man, and we cannot regard Jesus as being merely the product of His time as are other men. In Him there was a new beginning made, a new creation. It was fitting, therefore, that the Incarnation should have been accomplished by a unique act in the history of man, but an act continuous with the past.

One other point we may notice, though it cannot be proved. Many of the greatest thinkers of the Church have believed that the Incarnation would have taken place

even had there been no sin. It was God's purpose in the fulfilment of man's destiny, and not merely the correction of man's error. But in that case the Incarnation would have been free of its pain and agony. In the Incarnation, as we actually know it in history, we see not only God's remedy for sin, but also the completion of God's will for man.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Collect passages from the Creeds, the Thirty-Nine Articles, etc., which refer to the false teachings about the Incarnation. How do they rule such teaching out?

2. In the light of the definitions of the Creeds, explain: 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14:28); 'Then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28); 'But emptied Himself' (Phil. 2:7).

3. How would you prove from Scripture that Christ was perfect man, especially that He had a human will?

4. How do the Gospels suggest that our Lord shared man's limitations in knowledge?

5. Show how the Epistle to the Hebrews implies the full doctrine of the Incarnation.

6. How would you justify the statements made on page 28 about the historical and scientific evidence for the Virgin Birth?

7. Would you agree that the Incarnation was God's purpose for man apart from the fact of sin?

## CHAPTER V

### MAN

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him: and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?

Thou madest him lower than the angels; to crown him with glory and worship.

Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands: and hast put all things in subjection under his feet.

O Lord, our Governor: how excellent is Thy name in all the world.

—*Psalm 8:4, 5, 6, 9*

THE Bible opens with the story of creation, of which man is the crown. It shows man at peace with himself, with the world, and with God. The picture that is given is not necessarily that of a fully developed man, but of man in the best conditions to develop into all that God purposed. One of the conditions for that development was his work; no doubt that work at times would be difficult, but in meeting and overcoming the difficulties man would develop more and more. Another condition we notice in this picture is that man was not to develop in isolation, but in society which has its foundation in the family.

Another important part of this picture is the idea that man is made in the image of God. Quite possibly this was thought of at first as meaning that man's physical body was like God's; but very soon that thought grew to the deeper conception that there is something in man's nature which is akin to the nature of God Himself, and by which it is possible for him to have communion and fellowship with God and to share in God's work.

These chapters recognise that man has a kinship with the animal world; the animals and man are created on the sixth day (Gen. 1:24-31), and man is created out

of the earth (Gen. 2:7). But while there is that kinship, there is also a difference: among the animals 'there was not found an help meet for' the man (Gen. 2:20). The man alone is created in the image of God.

While it is true that in the light of modern knowledge and science we should today draw the picture in other ways, and the setting would be different, the fundamental ideas underlying the picture must remain the same. This picture of man as God intended him remains true after all allowance has been made for our fuller knowledge.

This picture is completed in Christ, for He is the perfect man. We see Him in every stage of human life perfect, and always in perfect communion with God, so that He could say, 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me' (John 4:34). Further, as in Christ we see that God's nature is essentially love, so we see also in Him that man's nature is essentially love, and it is only as we learn to love that we realise our true selves.

When, however, we look at ourselves, we find that the actual conditions are very different. We are not at peace with God or the world or ourselves. Our work, instead of being the happy means of development, becomes only too often a hopeless drudgery. We find that as life goes on, instead of developing love, we learn hatred and jealousy. So far from the doing of God's will being our meat, we often do not even want to do it. Instead of being at peace with God, we find ourselves rebelling against Him and life; or at most we are merely resigned that His will should be done when we cannot have our own way.

In short, we find that God's purpose for us has been spoiled because of the fact of sin. St John tells us that 'sin is lawlessness' (1 John 3:4), and that suggests the real heart of the matter; sin is the refusal to follow God's law and the determination to follow our own inclinations, which is anarchy. Sin thus becomes a personal act of our



wills opposing God's purpose. It is more than mere ignorance, for while ignorance has a large share in sin, ignorance would not explain our sense of guilt and shame and remorse after sin, unless it is what we call culpable or blameworthy ignorance, which means that we were ignorant because we refused the opportunity of knowing. Indeed, there have been times in the lives of all of us when we have known what we ought to do, but have not done it. All of us, when we are honest, know the fact of sin in our own lives; while we may make excuses for the mistakes of others, we can never acquit ourselves with those same excuses.

Sin, however, goes deeper than the individual acts of sin that we from time to time commit. First it is the attitude of ourselves and our wills. Even when we are able to conquer some sin, and perhaps, for example, do not say the angry words when we are injured, yet it is an effort. It does not come naturally or easily to be patient; there is still the sinful will to be conquered. That is why men can never be made good by law; law may control the actions, but it cannot change the will.

Secondly, we have to notice that there is a corporate sin of man. Man as a whole has refused to follow God's will, and more and more we are realising how we are caught in this corporate sin of man until escape seems impossible. It is man's sin, for example, which causes war; we cannot blame any individual, but it is because of man's lawlessness that the peace of God is not established. Or, to take another illustration, the bitterness and hatred in industrial relationships is caused by man's selfishness, and though both employers and employed may be very unselfish men, it seems impossible for them to escape from the effects of man's corporate selfishness. Sin is a factor in our nature which has to be reckoned with in any honest attempt to understand ourselves.

When we find that anything universally happens we expect there to be a universal cause, and we may reasonably expect one for this universal fact of sin. This cause is known technically by the name 'Original Sin'. By original sin we mean that our natures by our inheritance from our parents and by our environment have become warped or twisted, so that they cannot of themselves fulfil God's purposes. The material we begin with, as we may say, has been damaged. The result is that it is often more difficult to do right than wrong, and sometimes even when we wish to do right we find that we have not the power to do so. While the universality of sin shows that there is this original sin in man, we must not fall into the error of saying that our natures are totally corrupt. There still remains much that is good in man, and it is that good that makes it possible for him to be redeemed by God. Christ always saw the good there is in a man. And experience surely does suggest that parents who make the best of their lives pass on greater possibilities to their children than do careless parents.

So far we have assumed that man has free will, otherwise what has been said would be meaningless, and, indeed, there can be no real meaning in the conception of sin unless we have free will; but the time has come to examine that idea a little further. There are many today who would deny our freedom, saying that our character and actions are determined by what we inherit from our parents, by our environment, by our past, and by the particular circumstances in which we happen to be at any given time. Certainly our wills and choices are limited by all these factors, and we have not a perfectly free choice at every moment to do what we will. The fact that we find certain general characteristics in a nation, in a society like a school, and so on, shows how much parentage and environment affect our characters, and all of us



know in our experience how often we are unable to do what we would have liked because of the way we have lived our lives in the past. We have not such unlimited freedom that at every moment we can do anything we wish. But that is not what is meant by insisting on free will. First of all freedom always comes through obedience to laws: a motor-car will only remain free to fulfil its purpose as long as its laws are obeyed. The refusal to use oil, for example, will not vindicate the freedom of the driver, but will rather destroy his freedom, as he will soon be unable to use the motor. So when we refuse to follow God's will we do not prove our freedom; we only spoil ourselves, making it impossible for us to realise our true selves. It is true that God's service is perfect freedom. There is a sense in which our freedom has to be won.

As we look at ourselves and at other men we realise how much of our lives is determined by our heredity, environment, circumstances, and so on, but we cannot rid ourselves of our sense of responsibility; we feel we are right to say, 'It was I who did that deed, and I am responsible'. And we cannot quiet our conscience by excuses of heredity and so on. We do not blame a man because living in certain circumstances he contracts tuberculosis or leprosy; but we do blame the man who steals, no matter how great the pressure of his circumstances may be. We feel he could have risen higher. As has been said, heredity, environment, circumstances, our past history determine the battlefields on which we have to fight, but they do not determine the victory. All those things bring certain temptations and they exempt from others; thus the hungry man without property may be tempted to steal, but he is not tempted to 'grind the face of the poor'. We may not be responsible for the particular temptations we have to meet, but we are responsible for the way we deal with them, and whether we gain the victory or not. No

argument can ever really persuade us that we have no such responsibility.

This question is further complicated by the difficulty of reconciling our free will with the power, knowledge, and will of God. Here, as often, we find two truths which must be remembered, but it is far from easy to reconcile them or combine them. God rules the universe, and we often see that He overrules our thoughts and actions, so that through them His purposes are accomplished, and we can rest assured that nothing can in the end frustrate His will. But that does not mean we cannot oppose His will, and for a time prevent its being done as He would have it. We have seen already that God by His own will has limited His power by creating beings who have free will. Only so could man rise to the fulness of life which God intended for him—that is to say, by a willing obedience and co-operation with God. God reigns, and He is working His purposes out; we may rest confident in that. But He works through men, and when they will not respond to His call He waits till He can find another instrument. As we reflect on our own lives we can trace the overruling hand of God, but we are also certain of our own moral responsibility to Him.

We have already seen that our wills are not yet fully free. While we do have good desires and at times a good will, we find that evil is mixed with it. Only too often there is a conflict in ourselves. Our mind, our desires, our wills are in conflict; indeed, no one part is a unity. There are so many conflicting desires, the will itself is divided, our faith and our doubts are fighting each other, and there is no peace, no real freedom, until we are entirely subject to God (Rom. 7:14-25).

As we face our lives sincerely we realise how great is the power of sin, corrupting even our best and holiest things. We realise that we have no power of ourselves

to help ourselves, but the sin which is wrecking our lives has become part of ourselves. We cannot really hate our sin as God must hate it because our sin is our own lawless will. If there is to be any real remedy, it must be a remedy which will work in ourselves, transforming our wills; but yet that remedy must come from a power outside ourselves, for we have not the power ourselves. The remedy must come from God in a way that will transform our lives. The remedy is God's answer to the cry: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God' (Ps. 51:10).

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What natural characteristics of man's nature would suggest that our description of man's nature as God intended it is true? (*Cp.* St Augustine's saying, 'The heart is restless till it find rest in Thee'.)
2. Sin is here described as lawlessness. What other definitions or descriptions of sin can you find? Show how any real conception of sin involves a wrong choice of the will.
3. Show how our Lord always sought for a change of will in dealing with sin.
4. Suggest some problems in your life caused by the corporate sin of man rather than by any individual's sin.
5. Show what is the truth underlying the idea of the total depravity of man as taught by some of the Reformers.
6. How far is it true to say our freedom has to be won?
7. Suggest examples of God's overruling the wills of men, and of man's opposing and delaying the will of God.
8. Genesis 3 is not the account of the origin of sin, but an inspired description of how sin works. Discuss this.
9. How far does this chapter explain the feelings and desires expressed in Psalm 51?

## CHAPTER VI

### FORGIVENESS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
And in the depth be praise:  
In all His words most wonderful,  
Most sure in all His ways.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood,  
Which did in Adam fail,  
Should strive afresh against the foe,  
Should strive and should prevail;

And that a higher gift than grace  
Should flesh and blood refine,  
God's Presence and His very Self,  
And Essence all-divine.

—JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

SIN inevitably brings a separation between persons. Just because sin is the attitude of our wills, choosing our selfish ends rather than God's will of love, it results in breaking up the relationships between people. As we look at the world we see that this is just what has happened: nations are divided against nations, one set of people against another, and even Churches against Churches. Instead of our being united and fighting against the common enemies of man, we find there is jealousy, envy and hatred, making us fight one with the other, and so destroying our lives. And we find this is true with individuals. If instead of trying to serve the community a shopkeeper cheats us, we can no longer trust him, and we break off the relationship—that is to say, we do not buy from him again. But if the relationship is closer, if it is our friend who has done us a wrong, that friendship is broken; we

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cannot treat him as we did before. In these examples it is assumed that the offence is not a trivial one, but rather the greatest offence imaginable within that relationship. And so when we sin our relationship with God is broken, and God cannot treat us as though we had not sinned.

Sin causes separation, the breaking of relationship, and it cannot be an easy matter to restore the relationship. It is comparatively easy to forgive the shopman and to go to him again, but it is a very difficult matter to renew the friendship with our friend who has done us a great wrong and to trust him again perfectly. That is why it is so generally felt that when either partner of a marriage sins against the other it is almost impossible to renew that relationship; it seems that the old love and trust is forever broken and can never be renewed. The closest relationship of all is the relationship of a man to God, and therefore, when that relationship is broken, it is the hardest to restore.

This estrangement affects both persons. Just as we cannot trust the friend who has wronged us as we did before, so also we cannot approach our friend whom we have wronged. We realise that we are pursuing different aims, and until we have faced the matter frankly we cannot have the sympathy with each other which is necessary for friendship. This lack of sympathy is felt in any sort of difference, but it is most keen when there is a moral division.

The restoration of this relationship can only take place when the one who has done the wrong realises what he has done, and is so sorry for it that he hates his sin, and so becomes no longer the person whose character is shown by that sin. When he is so changed by penitence it is possible to restore the relationship. But even so there is need for more: in his penitence he must be ready to receive forgiveness and to trust the other person. True sorrow



can never claim forgiveness as a right; and, further, the offended person must be ready to forgive. As we see this process being worked out in human relationships we realise that usually it is only as the wronged person is ready to sympathise with the other, and to share in the shame and burden of his sin, that the sinner can realise the possibility of forgiveness, and gain the penitence that is necessary. Often as we consider some man who has fallen into grievous sin we feel that, humanly speaking, his only chance of getting right with himself and the world is the readiness of some good person who loves him, such as his mother or his wife, to share in the burden and the shame, and, in sharing it, to induce penitence and the longing for better things in himself.

As we consider our experience of human forgiveness we realise a further truth, and the most wonderful part of all the wonder of forgiveness. When a person has been willing to share in the suffering, the shame, and the remorse of sin in order to give forgiveness, and the sinner has been brought to realise his sin, to be really penitent, to trust the one who loves him, and to receive forgiveness, not only is the old relationship restored, but it is deepened. Through the experience of forgiving and being forgiven the relationship is made richer than it was before. Forgiveness is not merely a negative thing, cancelling the mistakes that have gone before; it is creative, adding something new: it increases the love between the persons.

It might appear from this that sin is a means of good, and therefore not altogether to be deplored. But no one who has really experienced forgiveness would ever feel that sin is to be desired that 'grace may abound' (Rom. 6:1). While through forgiveness the relationship is deepened, as we have said, the deepening of the relationship comes even better through perfect union, where there is no separation. Forgiveness alters the value of the past



act, and by our fresh knowledge of the one who forgives us we become more at one with him than we were before, but not more than we would have been had we never sinned. Always there must remain the remorse for past sin, and that remorse will for ever prevent us from regarding sin lightly.

In this account of forgiveness nothing has been said about punishment, because actually forgiveness has nothing to do with the letting off of punishment. Perhaps through leniency, carelessness, or lack of opportunity we may not punish; but that is not to forgive. Thus David let off the punishment of Absalom, but did not forgive him, when he let Absalom return to Jerusalem, but refused to see him (2 Sam. 14: 24). On the other hand we may punish and yet forgive. A father may punish his son just because he is ready and anxious to forgive (*cp.* Heb. 12: 5 ff.).

This idea of punishment has entered so much into the various interpretations of Christ's work that we must look a little further into it. There are four ways of thinking of punishment. The first is the most natural. Punishment is revenge: because the sinner has made others suffer, he must himself in turn suffer. Christ taught us that we must abolish any such idea from our thought of God, 'who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust' (Matt. 5: 45). We are taught that revenge is morally wrong for us, and what is wrong for us cannot be right for God. Moreover, as we see God working and revealing Himself in Christ, we find that that was not His attitude in dealing with sin.

The second conception of punishment is connected with its effect on others. This is the only possible justification for the inflicting of capital punishment by the state. It is difficult to see this as the full explanation of God's punishment, especially as fear does not produce the change of heart that God always requires. Fear may influence

our actions, but it cannot really change men's lives and wills. While this idea of punishment may have some part, it cannot be a great part in God's dealings with men.

A third use of punishment is to make the offender realise his sin, to help him to repent, and it may become an expression of his penitence. Often when we realise that we have done wrong we are glad to suffer something in order to express our sorrow. This use of punishment has its place in God's dealing with us, and, as we have seen, it may be inflicted just because God forgives us. It is important to realise that this kind of punishment is often inflicted after forgiveness, and is useful and necessary in all educational methods. But such punishment is not an equivalent for sin, and cannot be regarded as payment; if it is so thought of, it becomes revenge, and loses its educative value. It is difficult therefore, to see how our Lord could have borne this kind of punishment instead of us. While this conception of punishment does help us to understand some of God's dealings with us, it does not really help us to understand the meaning of Christ's sufferings.

The fourth way in which punishment is spoken of so alters the whole conception that, strictly speaking, it is not punishment at all. Sometimes we speak of the natural consequences of an action as punishment. We may say, for example, that if a man puts his finger in a flame he is punished by being burnt. In this way sin does have its natural consequences, which are painful. Those consequences largely remain after forgiveness: the man who has spoiled his health by careless living will not have his health immediately or entirely restored by forgiveness. Nor can we lose the sense of remorse for wasted years and for evil done. This is still more terrible if we have influenced others to wrong; then the burden of remorse is not removed, but in fact becomes heavier.

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But even this suffering is affected by forgiveness, which at least restores much of our true self-respect—a thing very different from self-confidence. We must notice that these natural consequences often fall on innocent people; the suffering caused by drunkenness, for example, is not confined to the drunkard, but is borne by his wife and children. This bearing of the suffering caused by sin, especially the spiritual suffering, falls heaviest on those who love us best; and the purer and holier the lover is, the heavier is that burden. The shame of sin is often far more keenly felt by the mother than by the guilty son. There is much in this which helps us to understand the sufferings of Christ; just because God loves us so greatly, the pain and suffering of our sin fall heaviest of all on Him. The Cross shows us what sin means to God. As we see the suffering our sins cause to those who love us best we begin to hate those sins. As we said earlier, often the only hope for a man is the readiness of his mother or his wife to bear the suffering of his sin, to take the shame, to be in close contact with all from which they naturally recoil. It is just that which God was doing in Christ when Christ died on the Cross.

We can now begin to understand the Christian doctrine of forgiveness, which has always been the central part of the Christian Gospel. First of all, we must notice that ever since Christ died upon the Cross men have found in their experience that through His death they have received the forgiveness of their sins. That was the experience of the early Church, and it is still the experience of countless thousands today. We have found that while our sin separates us from God, God has, through the Cross, broken down the barrier and made us one with Himself. We find that this experience comes to us through the sufferings and death of Christ. Sometimes, when men have tried to explain how this happens, and to think out theories

of the Atonement, they have suggested explanations which do not satisfy; but both their explanations and our dissatisfaction with them bear witness to the fact that in Christ God does give us forgiveness, and that is the most important thing for our souls.

When Christ appeared to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). He explained to them why He had to suffer, but we are not told that explanation; that is because every nation and every generation have to try to understand it in the light of their own thought and experience,—and we can never fully understand. Christ's explanation was for Jews of the first century. We need a different method of explanation, but the fact remains the same. We may well use the thoughts of past generations, for they all show some part of the truth, however inadequately, but we must also see how it works in our own experience.

There are two great thoughts used in the New Testament to explain the meaning. The first is shown in the metaphor or picture of redemption. In order to understand this we must remember that in using a picture the Jews thought only of the result and not of the method. (Compare question 5 on page 7.) In the Old Testament God is said to have redeemed Israel out of Egypt, because He had freed the people from their slavery, and the usual method of freeing a slave was by redeeming, or buying him back. But when God redeemed Israel He did not pay any money or compensate the Egyptians; instead, we read that the Egyptians gave the Israelites silver and gold and raiment (Exod. 12:35, 36). So in the New Testament we are often described as being in bondage to sin, but through the Cross of Christ we have been set free, or have been redeemed. While we may speak legitimately in certain senses of the price paid, we must not try to press the picture further, or ask to whom

was the price paid. We may also notice that it is only in connection with this picture of redemption that Christ is said in the New Testament to have given His life instead of us (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6); elsewhere it is always 'on our behalf'. In the last chapter we saw how sin had limited our freedom, and we really have to gain the freedom of our wills; this is an important part of Christ's work. Through the Cross He breaks the bonds of our sins, and so sets us free. 'If therefore, the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed' (John 8:36).

The other great illustration which we find in every part of the New Testament is the conception of sacrifice. In all parts of the world we find that sacrifice is used. While there are many differences, and most worshippers could not express the meaning of their sacrifices clearly, there are certain common ideas. First of all it is recognised that men should make an offering to God, and that in that offering men are made one with God; when there has come separation, it is by such an offering that the union is restored. We should also notice that in the sacrifices it is the offering of the life that is important; the death of the victim is an unimportant detail. In some parts of Nigeria the blood is actually offered before the victim is dead, and even on some occasions the victim is allowed to recover to be used for another sacrifice. Usually, and certainly in the Old Testament, the sacrifice was regarded as the way appointed by God for the offering to be made, and not a device originating from man. But while these sacrifices pointed to the need for men to become one with God through the offering of life, actually they could never effect that union. But the Christians found that the union which men had longed for, but never gained, was indeed effected by Christ through His offering of Himself upon the Cross. They therefore

naturally said that He had made the one perfect sacrifice, and that they were saved by His Blood—that is to say, His life offered through death.

As we look at the work of Christ and try to understand its meaning, we must always remember that it is God who is revealing Himself in Christ. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son' (John 3:16). We must never think that Christ induced or persuaded God to forgive us. We can only set our thoughts aright in this matter as we remember the absolute unity of Christ and the Father. The whole story is how God broke down the barrier of sin to give us forgiveness, and always as we look at Jesus we must say, 'There is God'.

We see, then, in Jesus God seeking His lost children. Sin had separated us from God, but the love of God crossed the barrier. Sin prevented us from reaching up to God, but love stooped down to where we were in order to raise us up. First of all God took our nature into Himself and identified Himself with us, and not only with us as men, but also with us as fallen men. That is the meaning of our Lord's Baptism (*cp.* Matt. 3:14, 15). Although He knew no sin, He identified Himself with fallen men; He took the burden of man's sin with all its shame, and therefore shared in John's Baptism for the remission of sins. So also throughout His life He ever identified Himself with sinners, sharing their life; even though His awful purity hated all the defilement of sin, He deliberately became 'the friend of publicans and sinners' (Luke 7:34). The temptation constantly came to avoid the suffering and the pain that such an identification meant, but He always refused to avoid suffering which was necessary for that complete identification. Almost the worst part of such suffering that love can have is when

it is rejected. And that was the cup of suffering which Christ had to drain to the dregs as He went to the Cross. Not only did His enemies like the priests triumph, and indifferent people like Pilate consent because it was the easier way, but even one of His intimate friends betrayed Him, another denied Him, and the rest forsook Him and fled. All the suffering that sin can inflict on love He endured, and He endured to the end. In so far as we may distinguish here between Christ and the Father, we only see another part of the suffering of love revealed in the Cross. If it is pain to find our own love rejected, it is perhaps even greater pain to see the love of someone we love rejected. As we look at the Cross of Christ we see perfectly revealed the love of God, which 'endured such gainsaying of sinners against themselves' (Heb. 12: 3; R.V.)—the love which endured all that sin could do against it, and by remaining true to itself triumphed over sin. The Cross in a moment of history reveals the eternal Cross in the heart of God as long as there is any sin to violate His love. 'Hereby God commendeth His own love to us, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' (Rom. 5: 8).

When we thus see the love of God revealed in Christ Crucified for us, we find that God has done everything in order to forgive us. God gives us His love freely, and no matter how much we have sinned He is longing for us to return. All that prevents our union with Him comes from us. As we have seen, forgiveness to be complete requires the co-operation of both sides. The offended person must do his share through sacrificial love, and the offender must do his through humility and penitence. God has done everything from His side; it is our failure that prevents us from enjoying the full happiness of forgiveness.

There is, however, not only the aspect of the Cross in



which God in Christ reveals His love to us, there is also the fact that in Christ man made the one perfect offering to God. As we have seen, man instinctively feels that it is his duty to make an offering to God, but the only offering that God can accept is the offering of a pure life, which is the one thing we are unable to offer. The sin in our lives prevents us. But Christ as man made that perfect offering; He lived a real human life with real temptations, and yet, He was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Those temptations culminated at the Cross. Had our Lord faltered for one moment He could have avoided the Cross. As we think of the temptations of our lives, especially the temptations to sins of the spirit, we can see them almost all attacking Christ then; and yet He completely resisted them, and so He as man gained the complete victory over sin. Never did He lose His faith in God, never did He abandon His love for men.

We may notice here what was possibly the culmination of those temptations of the Cross, though we must speak with hesitation about a mystery into which we hardly dare to enter. Our Lord had consistently identified Himself with sinners and had taken the burden and the shame of their sin. It seems that for a brief space He felt that that burden had cut Him off from God, that sin had thus come between Him and God; God seemed to be silent, and the agony of that silence brought out the cry, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' (Mark 15:34). And yet even in that dark hour He did not lose His faith or love; and He went on in faith, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit' (Luke 23:46). He had triumphed. He had the right to say, 'It is finished' (John 19:30).

One further point we may notice, though it involves a difficult thought. Forgiveness depends at least partly on penitence, but one of the facts of sin is that it blinds

us to its true nature. Sin never appears so hideous to the sinner as to the saint, and therefore we cannot feel the full penitence that we should, just because we ourselves are the sinners. But when Christ, the one sinless man, took our sin and guilt upon Himself, He could and did feel the full sinfulness of sin, and therefore as man could offer to God man's true penitence for sin.

As the Cross is the fullest revelation of God's love, showing how nothing can defeat it, it is also the fullest revelation of sin. Nowhere else can we so clearly see the evil of sin. When sin met perfect goodness, its only response was to try to destroy it, and thus sin is most fully condemned. It is to be remembered that the sins which sent Jesus to the Cross are the sins of ordinary men, and therefore in the Cross we see the true meaning of our own sin. In this way the Cross of Christ is the condemnation of sin, but it is also the assurance of the victory over sin, for in the Cross love triumphed.

In the Cross sin and love met in their supreme conflict, and sin was defeated. The Resurrection was not merely an historical fact; it was a spiritual and moral necessity. Through its endurance to the end, even to death, love rises to the higher, fuller life. The Cross and the Resurrection must not be thought of separately; they are a unity. Our oneness with God comes through His love in Christ, becoming man, enduring the Cross, and rising to life. In Christ we find the moral nature of life vindicated, and therefore in Christ we find our perfect reconciliation to God and to life.

The more we meditate upon God's forgiveness in Christ, the less can we be satisfied with any of our attempts to explain it. Many books have been written, and while we may gain much from them for our spiritual life, in the end we find we cannot fathom the divine grace or its meaning. But as we approach the Cross, we can

know in our experience that there God was in Christ bringing us forgiveness, and that there we find our peace with God, and the power we need for life.

'We may not know, we cannot tell  
What pains He had to bear,  
But we believe it was for us  
He hung and suffered there.

'He died that we might be forgiven,  
He died to make us good,  
That we might go at last to Heaven,  
Saved by His precious Blood'.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Discuss the statement, 'Sin makes a more serious breach of friendship than any other cause of separation, because it is primarily a matter of will'.
2. Give examples from your own experience of one person feeling the shame of another's sin as his own.
3. Explain the statement that 'full forgiveness alters the moral value of a sinful act'.
4. Give illustrations of the different kinds of punishments.
5. Collect passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament about redemption. What parts of the work of Christ do they illustrate?
6. What different kinds of sacrifices are mentioned in the Old Testament? What were their uses? How do they illustrate the work of Christ? Study carefully the use made in Hebrews of the Old Testament sacrifices.

7. Suggest other passages in the New Testament like Rom. 5:8, which show that the Cross is the revelation of the Father's love.

8. Collect passages from the New Testament suggesting the idea of the Cross as man's offering to God.

9. Explain the statement that in Christ we find the perfect reconciliation to life.

## CHAPTER VII

### JUSTIFICATION

When I survey the wondrous cross  
Where the young Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

—ISAAC WATTS

In the last chapter we were thinking of what God has done through Christ to bring us home to Himself and to make us at peace with Himself. We have now to think of how we receive that forgiveness and respond to God's work. For, as we saw, in forgiveness there are two sides, both the wronged person and the sinner having their parts before forgiveness is complete. The first great Christian thinker to explain this was St Paul, and we have to follow in the path he showed. This is especially important, as the words we use come chiefly from him.

St Paul had begun trying to serve God as a Jew, and, as he tells us, he had tried to find peace with God by a careful observation of the Law; he had tried to earn God's favour, and he was 'as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless' (Phil. 3:6). He seemed to have everything in his favour: he belonged to the right nation, and was a member of the Pharisees, the most religious part of that nation; he had been taught by one of the best teachers of his time, Gamaliel, and he had really tried to do what he believed right. But in spite of

all that, he had failed to find peace. Then suddenly on the Damascus road he discovered that peace could be his, not for anything he had done or could do, but simply for what Christ had done. He found that God had done all: he himself had merely to receive. From that time he gave himself to spreading this good news which he had found, and the great controversy of his life, on the question of circumcision, was concerned with one particular aspect of this Gospel he had discovered.

To describe this experience of the Gospel, St Paul uses the Jewish thought of 'justification', and to understand this word we must again remember that the Jews thought of the result rather than the method. To the Jew, therefore, justification did not mean to make righteous, but to declare righteous or to acquit—that is to say, to treat a person as a righteous man. Thus in *Exod. 23:7* God says, 'I will not justify the wicked'—that is to say, will not declare him innocent. Again, *Isaiah in 5:23* condemns those who 'justify the wicked for a reward'. It would be a good work to make a wicked man good, but what is condemned is clearly the pronouncing of a wrong verdict in the court. The question that was always before the Jew was how is a man to be acquitted before God and so be at peace with Him (*cp. Ps. 143:2*): 'Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified'. The answer the Jews had given was that it was by the keeping of the Law. It was by that way that St Paul had been trying to find peace and had failed; he knew by his own conscience that he could never be justified or acquitted by his own works, as before God there could be no place for human merit. When he saw Christ on the road to Damascus he realised he had been trying in the wrong way. He had not to earn God's favour, but only to receive it; it is not for our merits we are justified, but by the grace of God for the merit of Christ.

There is need here to be careful of our idea of grace. Grace means the favour, help, influence and power that God gives to us. It is therefore something spiritual and personal, and can only be given by spiritual and personal means. There can be nothing mechanical about grace. We receive the grace of God just in the spiritual and personal ways we receive the good will, help, influence, and power of any person greater, better, and wiser than ourselves.

We do not and cannot earn this grace of God, which brings us peace and admits us into His presence and friendship; we can only receive it, and we receive it by faith. This word 'faith', again, requires examining, for it is used in several senses: (a) In the Old Testament it usually means faithfulness, as in St Paul's favourite text, 'But the just shall live by his faith' (Heb. 2:4). (b) In St Paul faith means the trust one person can have in another, as a child in his parent, or a man in God. We should notice that in this sense faith in anyone involves being in sympathy with that person or on his side; we cannot have faith in the general of the enemy's army. This same idea is implied in the Creeds, 'I believe in God', and not 'I believe that God exists'. (c) In the Epistle to the Hebrews faith has yet another meaning: 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1). It means the power of seeing the spiritual realities and the confidence that right must triumph over wrong; that apparently impossible ideals can be accomplished. Thus we speak of the faith of Wilberforce and the other social reformers who saw that it was possible to do away with slavery and other evils. (d) In the Pastoral and General Epistles we find 'the faith' meaning the general body of Christian doctrine: 'The faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints' (Jude 3); 'I have kept the faith' (2 Tim. 4:7). (e) Lastly,



in St James it means intellectual consent: 'Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble' (Jas. 2: 19). All these ideas are included when we speak of being justified by faith, but most important are the ideas of personal trust and the power of seeing spiritual realities. We can only receive a person's good will and the spiritual power he can give us as we trust him; so too we can only receive God's grace as we trust Him.

In explaining this we must be careful that we do not suggest that faith is a particular form of merit which God rewards. Our faith is the way by which we receive God's gift. When we receive a material gift from a friend we must take it, but the gift is not the reward of our taking it. So it is only as we trust God that we can receive His grace.

This Gospel of the grace of God has always seemed too good to be true, and the idea that we have to earn our salvation is continually recurring in men's thoughts. But it is just the assurance that our acceptance with God rests on His work and His gift which is the heart of the Gospel. That is why, as it has been said, every great revival in the history of the Church has been through the rediscovery of St Paul.

There does, however, seem a grave objection to this. It is not really immoral, suggesting that sin does not matter? This objection has constantly been urged. St Paul was accused of teaching, 'Let us sin that grace may abound' (*cp.* Rom. 4: 1, 15); and the religious leaders of the Jews found fault with our Lord because He 'received sinners' (Luke 15: 2). At first sight this does sound a very grave objection, but first we should notice that in actual practice it does not work out so; it would almost seem as if the holders of this teaching were more inclined to see sin where there is no sin.

No one who has looked on the Cross of Jesus and there seen what sin means to God can ever think that sin does not matter. As we have seen, forgiveness is no easy thing, and in order that God might forgive He had to endure the Cross. If once we have realised that, we know as we could never know in any other way the evil that sin is. As we see Christ crucified, we cannot help but hate sin, and therefore the Cross itself shows that forgiveness does not mean an easy-going ignoring of sin. Rather we see how costly forgiveness is. The fact that we cannot earn forgiveness does not make it less valued. We cannot earn love. No man can earn the love of his wife—that is given; but any man who has received such a love knows that it must transform his whole character.

Then we must notice that the grace is received through faith—not our mere intellectual belief, but our personal trust in God. Faith is therefore a moral quality, and, as we have seen, it involves putting ourselves on the side of God, and therefore allowing ourselves to be transformed by Him. This does not mean, as we have said, that faith in any way merits God's grace; what it does do is to enable us to receive His grace.

We also saw that part of the meaning of Christ's life is that He identifies Himself with us. We find that, as St Paul said, Christ lives in us and we in Him, and therefore His life transforms ours and makes us one with Himself, and so conquers sin in us. This is what St Paul means when he says, 'That I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith' (Phil. 3:9).

We are here again faced with a problem we have glanced at before. If our forgiveness comes entirely from God, and not for any merit of ours, so that our Lord even said, 'No man can come to Me, except the Father which sent

Me draw him' (John 6:44), does it not mean that He gives grace to some and not to others? All of us who have known His forgiveness know that it is only by His grace that we are what we are. But yet we see others better and wiser than ourselves who are not Christians. Are we to say that God has just left them or even reprobated them to damnation? As we saw before, there are several sides of the truth here, and we must not neglect any. While there are sayings in the Bible which, taken by themselves, might suggest such an idea, we must remember the other sayings: 'Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37); 'It is not the will of your Father which is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish' (Matt. 18:14); 'Who willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:4). We must remember that God's grace does not destroy our free will, and it is possible for us to resist His grace and will (*cp.* Acts 7:51; 1 Thess. 5:19). While our salvation depends on God, we have to co-operate with Him—that is to say, to join our wills with His. When words like 'predestination' and 'election' are used in the New Testament, we may perhaps understand them better if we use the word 'selection'. God selects certain people or nations for certain privileges and responsibilities, but they have to 'make their election sure' (2 Pet. 1:10). The most famous example is Judas. Christ selected him to be an Apostle, but he fell away from God's calling. It is not for us to decide what God's purpose for others is; but as we ourselves know God's calling and grace, we find great strength and encouragement, knowing that 'He which began a good work in us will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:6).

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Collect passages in the New Testament speaking of justification. Does the meaning of 'declare righteous' fit them all?

2. Examine the uses of the word 'grace' in the New Testament. What meanings do you think it has?

3. What answer did St Paul give to the objection that his teaching about justification encouraged sin?

4. How would you explain 'the righteousness which is of God by faith' (Phil. 3:9)?

5. Examine St Paul's teaching about election in Rom. 8:29, 30; 9:19-33; Eph. 1:9-11.

6. Suggest examples of people other than Judas who did not fulfil God's election, and suggest others who did.

7. Some Christians have taught that it is impossible for a man whom God has predestined to life finally to resist God's grace and fall away. Discuss this idea.



## CHAPTER VIII

### SANCTIFICATION

Can it be true, the grace He is declaring?

Oh, let us trust Him, for His words are fair!

Man, what is this, and why art thou despairing?

God shall forgive thee all but thy despair.

Truly He cannot, after such assurance,

Truly He cannot and He shall not fail:

Nay, they are known, the hours of thine endurance,

Daily thy tears are added to the tale.

Yea, thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning

He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:

Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,

Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.

—F. W. H. MYERS

JUSTIFICATION is the beginning of the Christian life, but it is not the end. We are forgiven as soon as we return to God to receive forgiveness, but there is the further process of being made righteous, or, as it is called, being sanctified. In practice justification and sanctification are very closely connected, and it would be impossible for anyone really to have experienced forgiveness without becoming more righteous. In theory we consider sanctification after justification, but in actual life it often begins before—as soon as the grace of God is admitted into the heart. Sanctification is, however, a process which goes on all through our lives.

Often in the New Testament sanctification is spoken of as complete, as when St John says, 'Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin' (1 John 3:9). For as we have the Spirit of Christ in us, our whole lives have been

changed; we have gained the complete victory over sin. When we are thinking of the meaning of our experience we have to think of it as perfect, as, for example, when we are describing the Christian home we have to assume a perfect Christian marriage to begin with, whereas, however truly and rightly the marriage begins, it needs to be perfected by later experience. So for some purposes we must assume the sanctification to be complete, though in our lives here it is never fully finished; there is always something more to be attained. When we look at the whole of the New Testament instead of isolated texts we find it fully recognised that we 'have not yet attained, nor are already made perfect' (Phil. 3:12).

As in justification, the power for the changing of our lives comes through Christ's indwelling through the Holy Spirit. He comes to us and by His influence changes our inmost selves. We find something similar in all our intercourse with people. When we are with others, especially those we love and respect, we find their lives are being reproduced in us; we imitate their words, actions and characteristics, often quite unconsciously, we even find ourselves thinking their thoughts. So as Christ lives in us we find ourselves imitating Him, living His life. 'It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is' (1 John 3:2). This is our great hope in Christ.

We may notice here the difference Christ makes in our attitude to life. As we meet life with its difficulties inequalities, pain and injustice, its mystery and perplexity, we are often tempted to rebel against it and God, and in a hopeless fight against life we ruin our souls and become hard and bitter. Or sometimes we think that the right attitude is mere resignation, and we become enfeebled and useless. But as we see life with Christ we are reconciled

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to it and to God; we find the 'peace of God which passeth all understanding' (Phil. 4:7), knowing that 'to them that love God all things work together for good' (Rom. 8:28). We can fight against evil with the strength with which Christ fought against it; we can suffer with the endurance of Christ; we know how 'to abound and to be in want. We can do all things in Him that strengtheneth us' (*cp.* Phil. 4:12, 13).

When we were considering justification we saw that there could be no place for our 'works', but in sanctification our works have their place through the grace of God. As St Paul says, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure' (Phil. 2:12, 13). It is clear, if we consider a little, that by our prayers, our meditations, our worship, both private and public, by our sharing in various works for God, we do advance in holiness, and similarly if we neglect these things we hinder our progress. Such works do not indeed bring us any merit with God, for, as our Lord said, 'When ye shall have done all things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do' (Luke 17:10). Further, it is only by the grace or the help and the power of God that we can even want to do them, or when we do so want, that we accomplish them.

Not only have our works in this way a part in our own salvation, but also a part in the salvation of others. Most of us owe our salvation, humanly speaking, at least in part, to the good works of others—their prayers, their examples, their teaching, and often their suffering. It is not given us to know the full extent to which God uses such work, but as we look around us we see how much is actually done by saints, mostly unknown, who have been faithful. So it is that St Paul advises the Corinthians,

'Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord' (1 Cor. 15:58).

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Collect the passages of St Paul where he uses the phrase, 'In Christ'.

2. Draw out the meaning of the following passages: 'If thou wilt be perfect' (Matt. 19:21). 'That they may be perfect in one' (John 17:23). 'To make . . . perfect through suffering' (Heb. 2:10). 'That they without us should not be made perfect' (Heb. 11:40).

3. Read 1 John 3:1-12 carefully and explain it.

4. 'Works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of His Spirit are not pleasant to God, . . . they have the nature of sin' (Article 14). Discuss this.

5. A distinction has often been made between the precepts of the Gospel, which are binding on every Christian, and the counsels, which do not apply to all men. Examine this idea and suggest its uses and dangers.

6. Show that in sanctification our wills must take their share, and yet it can only be accomplished by the grace of God.

7. Sanctification is not something mechanical, as it were, but is the result of personal relationship. Explain this.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RISEN AND ASCENDED CHRIST

Thou art the King of Glory: O Christ.

Thou art the everlasting Son: of the Father.

When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man: Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.

When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death: Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God: in the glory of the Father.

We believe that Thou shalt come: to be our Judge.

We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants: whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.

Make them to be numbered with Thy saints: in glory everlasting.

—*Te Deum Laudamus*

THE work of Christ, as the Incarnate Son of God, did not end on the first Easter Day or at the Ascension. He is still Incarnate, still perfect God and perfect man, though no longer under the conditions of this life. The Resurrection and Ascension are stages of the return of our Lord to the Father, and for doctrinal purposes need not be separated. The Resurrection and Ascension were God's vindication of Christ, the reversal of man's judgment, the guarantee of our faith. It would, indeed, be difficult to imagine our belief in God as revealed in Christ apart from the Resurrection; historically it was the Resurrection which changed the Apostles, and spiritually it is only as we see love emerging to fuller and greater life through its defeat that we can give ourselves to trust in that love.

For a short time after the Resurrection Christ remained in some sense on earth for the special purposes of con-

vincing the disciples of the Resurrection, and giving them their final instructions. But He did not give them His presence as in the days of Galilee, for they had to learn the greater and closer presence of Christ dwelling in them through the Spirit. For that reason, after the forty days, the Resurrection appearances were ended, except when our Lord appeared to St Paul on the Damascus road; and our Lord returned fully to the Father at the Ascension.

The life of Christ after the Resurrection belongs primarily to the spiritual realm, and therefore we have no language which can adequately describe it; we are compelled to use pictures, which, while not the full truth, give an idea of the truth. We have to use such phrases as 'returned', 'ascended', 'the right hand of God', not because they are adequate, but because they are the least inadequate. While we may well believe in the physical ascension of Christ, the important thing is to see it as a picture of a spiritual reality.

At Bethlehem the Logos had, from one point of view, gone out from God in order to identify Himself with us; at the Ascension, still identified with us, and still with our nature, He returned to God, and in that return He brings us also to God. This meaning of the Ascension is brought out most clearly in Heb. 7: 24, 25: 'He because He abideth for ever, hath His priesthood unchangeable. Wherefore also He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them'. The word 'intercession' here has a wider meaning than intercessory prayer; it means all kinds of active help on behalf of another. By His return to the Father He brings us into the very presence of God, so that we can share in His risen and ascended life.

Part of Christ's work as the ascended Lord is to judge the world. This He does not only as God, as is pictured

in the Old Testament, but also as man. His judgment is the judgment of man from within, not only as it were of God from without. Sometimes this judgment has been thought of as the 'great assize', with Christ seated on the 'Great White Throne' (e.g., Rev. 20:11). In passing we may notice that the book mentioned in this passage is the Book of Life. God is pictured as looking for the opportunities of giving life, and not, as is so often suggested, for all the sins He can record against us. In the Gospel of St John the judgment is pictured as eternal, the judgment passed by ourselves as we develop and reveal our character. 'This is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light' (John 3:19). The form of the picture matters little; there is truth in both forms, but the essential truth is that 'we believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge'. The judgment is not to be thought of as only of life and death, but it is the judgment of our lives to record our achievement, and to decide our position, like the judgment of an examination which records the prize-winners, first, second and third classes. The judgment is for approval rather than for condemnation.

At this point we naturally ask about those who have not received Christ, possibly because they have never had a chance. It is, of course, impossible to speak with much certainty, but we can be confident that 'the Judge of all the earth will do right' (cp. Gen. 18:25). And we may be sure that God's judgment is far more merciful than ours, and that Christ's work of Atonement covers far more and not less than we have imagined. In 1 Pet. 3:19 and 4:6 there is the suggestion that after His death on the Cross Christ proclaimed the Gospel to those who had died. We may then trust God about such people, though we may not presume on His mercy. It must, however, be remembered that no man, whatever his condition, can

receive forgiveness except for the merits of Christ Jesus.

At this point we should notice that there is the possibility of losing eternal life; there is the resurrection to condemnation (John 5:29). No doubt there has been much that is unwise spoken on this subject, and our knowledge is far more limited than has often been supposed. There are, however, sufficient warnings in Scripture to make us realise there is a possibility of being for ever excluded from the presence of God, and while no doubt the language is picture language, it does mean something. God will never force a man to be good, and therefore it is possible for a man to resist God eternally, and so lose life eternal. More than that it is unwise to say, except to point out that the warnings of Scripture, and especially of our Lord Himself, are not directed to notorious sinners or the heathen, as much as to religious men who were satisfied with themselves, and so were resisting the purposes of God.

Closely connected with the idea of Christ's work as Judge is the belief in the Second Coming. Here again we need to be cautious about what we say, and not to presume to know more than we actually do. One point we must be careful to remember in connection with this doctrine is that the victory over evil can never be gained except by love; only the Cross of Christ can conquer the evil will. We must always be careful that we do not suggest that Christ will in the end do away with evil by the very methods He rejected at the Temptation. In interpreting the various sayings we need to remember our Lord's solemn words before Caiaphas: 'From this moment ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven' (Matt. 26:64; Luke 22:69). (This is the clear meaning of the two Greek expressions in Matthew and Luke trans-



lated as 'from this moment'; they do not mean 'in the future'.) On the Cross Christ came in the power of God. Another warning we need in our interpretation is that our Lord deliberately led His disciples to think of a fuller presence than His bodily one—'It is expedient for you that I go away' (John 16:7)—and we must not try to go back to the more elementary stage. The belief in the Second Coming has indeed a real place in the Christian faith, and while we may not know exactly how and when it will happen, it stands for the fact that the love of Christ must in the end triumph over sin, and that His words will be fulfilled: 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself' (John 12:32).

The work of Christ is to issue in eternal life. Eternal life is not something entirely future; we have the beginnings now. 'Whosoever believeth on Him hath everlasting life' (John 3:16). 'Whosoever believeth on Me shall never die' (John 11:26). 'Your life is hid with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3). Already we share in the risen life of Christ, and so already possess a life which death cannot touch. 'Neither death, nor life, . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38, 39). While the fulness of eternal life no doubt is still to come, we have the beginnings here and now.

This brings us once again to the thought of the resurrection of the body. And once again we must be careful not to say more than we know. We are dealing with subjects beyond our experience, and therefore all language and all ideas must be inadequate. We need to be careful of the analogy of our Lord's body during the forty days before the Ascension. While His Resurrection is the guarantee of ours, His appearances were for certain conditions and purposes which do not apply to ours. Thus He did actually eat, but we have no reason to suppose

that our resurrection body will need food. St Paul insists that there is a body, and that it has the closest connection with our present body; but He emphatically says: 'We sow not that body that shall be'; 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God'; 'We shall all be changed' (1 Cor. 15:37, 50, 51). There is a body, but it is a 'spiritual body', a phrase which, if we did not use it so easily, would ever remind us that we are dealing with something beyond our experience and knowledge.

Our bodies are the instruments of our personalities whereby we express ourselves to others and understand others. Without our bodies our personalities would be isolated, cramped and maimed, with no possibility of developing. In the Resurrection we are assured that we shall have the perfect instrument for our personalities, a spiritual body, which will be free from the limitations of this earthly body, which so often distracts and hinders the soul. The life of the world to come is a richer, fuller life than this, and has greater possibilities. With our changed bodies made like unto His glorious body, we shall know the joy of Christ fulfilled; as we shall be ever with Him, which is far better (*cp.* Phil. 3:21; 1:23).

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Collect the passages in Acts referring to the Resurrection of Christ. What interpretations of the Resurrection are there suggested?
2. Find passages which speak of the intercession of Christ. Find also passages which imply that intercession has a wider meaning than prayer.
3. Comment on the following passages: 'This is He which is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead' (Acts 10:42). 'We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ' (2 Cor. 5:10). 'Then shall each man have his praise from God' (1 Cor. 4:5).

4. While the thought of the Judgment is a solemn one, the Christian should look forward to it with joyful confidence and hope. Explain this, showing that this is the attitude of the writers of the New Testament.
5. Illustrate from the New Testament what is said here about the possibility of losing eternal life.
6. Try to gather what our Lord Himself said about the Second Coming, and see how it is to be interpreted.
7. What other passages can you find in the New Testament about the resurrection of the body? How do you understand them?
8. Collect passages in the New Testament which describe the state of the dead in Christ, and show what is the Christian hope.

## CHAPTER X

### THE HOLY SPIRIT

Spirit of God, in whom we have our being;  
In whom our spirits new-created move,  
Reveal Thyself, that we Thy Godhead seeing,  
May lose ourselves in true adoring love.

Spirit of God, unutterably tender,  
Show us Thyself, that all things else may fall  
From our weak grasp, and in complete surrender  
We know that we are nothing, Thou art all.

O mighty Spirit, Thou art all-pervading;  
Encompass us, till we are lost in Thee;  
Lighten our lives, that, earthly shadows fading,  
We may live radiant in Thy purity.

—*St George's Prayer Book*

WE have already thought of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as part of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and we have several times referred to His indwelling presence in the Christian. The time has come to consider our thought about the Holy Spirit more carefully. During His ministry our Lord prepared the disciples for the coming of the Spirit, and after the Resurrection He told them to wait in Jerusalem before beginning their work until they received the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). After Pentecost the reception of the Spirit was considered as one of the most definite marks of Christianity (*cp.* Acts 19: 1-7). The work of the Holy Spirit in men, of course, did not begin at Pentecost. Always the Church has regarded the Old Testament prophets as inspired by the Holy Spirit, and still today we must regard all that is good and true and beautiful as coming from Him, even

when it is not directly Christian. Yet through Christ the Christian possesses the Spirit in a way impossible before or apart from Christ. This seems to be the meaning of that difficult saying in St John: 'The Holy Spirit was not yet' (John 7:39).

It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives which makes our justification and sanctification possible. He comes into us and transforms us; it is only as we realise this in our lives that the Christian faith becomes a living reality and not merely a dead theory. We must notice that the Spirit is given to all believers, and every Christian should receive Him, but usually the Spirit is spoken of as being imparted through the fellowship of the believers.

The first effect of the Spirit in our lives is the transforming of our character. In Gal. 5: 22 *f.* St Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit. We should notice the word 'fruit' is singular; the Christian should be developing in all these different qualities, though not necessarily at the same rate. But the Christian character is a unity, and we cannot be content with achieving some part of it and leaving the rest. If we have the Spirit of God we must be developing the whole of the Christian character.

Another way in which the Holy Spirit develops and transforms our character is by the giving of the 'seven-fold gifts'—wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, godliness, and the fear of the Lord. These gifts transform the inner life, and it is only by that transformation that we can produce the fruit of the Spirit. This renewal of life and character is not something to be attained through a conscientious attempt to follow the example of Christ, but a gift of the Spirit which we have to receive. At the same time we do have to co-operate with the Spirit, and in this, as in everything else, the Spirit does not do our share.

Then we must notice that the Spirit gives various gifts

to different people for the building up of the Church. He does not give all the gifts to one person. To one He gives the gift of speaking, to another the gift of organising; to one man He gives gifts of intellect, often to be worked out almost alone, to another He gives special gifts of friendship. We do not all have the same gifts, but He divides the gifts according to the work He has designed for us (*cp.* 1 Cor. 12:4 *ff.*). We must not, however, interpret this to mean that we are necessarily to be content with the limitation of our gifts. It is possible to develop them, and, indeed, unless we do use and develop them we lose them. Also we often find ourselves in situations demanding gifts which apparently we do not possess, and yet by the grace of the Spirit we can develop such gifts. Often as we look at the lives of the greatest men we see that they have by the power of the Spirit developed the very gifts which they seemed to lack. The Spirit gives us whatever gifts are needed for the particular situation in which we are.

Thirdly, He gives us guidance in our thoughts and lives. Much of the needless anxiety of our lives is caused through neglecting this important truth. As we have to make decisions and to act, often without the chance of previous thought, we may rightly rely on the Spirit to guide us aright, but we must not so emphasise this side of the truth that we neglect other sides. From time to time in Christian history there have arisen movements which have insisted on the inner light given by the Spirit, and they have been impatient of other authority, whether of the Church or the Bible. While the direct inspiration of the Spirit in every believer is a vital truth to Christianity, we must remember that all of us are liable to mistake our own desires and thoughts for His guidance. Our interpretation also of His guidance may be mistaken. We need the discipline of the fellowship and the testing of our

thoughts by the revelation given in the Bible. Another warning of a different kind is needed. We may not rely on the guidance of the Spirit to cover our own carelessness and laziness. Normally the Spirit will not guide the preacher who does not prepare his sermon, though, having done his share in careful thought and preparation, the preacher may rightly rely on the Spirit's guidance. In this, as in most other matters, God more often works through the usual than the unusual, through the normal than the miraculous. If we are wise we shall be careful before we claim that any thought or action was inspired by the Spirit, but we shall expect His guidance and therefore we shall be freed from undue worry and anxiety.

Another part of the work of the Spirit in our lives is the transforming of our work. He takes our efforts sincerely offered in His name to bring about results far beyond what could have been expected; and He even transforms our mistakes so that they help in the forwarding of His work. So, too, St Paul says He transforms our prayers, changing them from their weakness to His strength and power (Rom. 8:26). It is indeed only by the indwelling of the Spirit that we can pray or work effectively. As we consider our prayers and works we are very conscious how weak they are, but we may take courage from our belief in the Spirit, knowing that if we are faithful He will transform our weakness into strength. Such a belief is not an inducement to laziness or carelessness, but an incentive to better work, stronger efforts, and more faithful prayer, relying not on ourselves, but on Him.

As we think of the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives we must remember that He works by personal means. He does not give His gifts as a man may give a present to another; rather it is to be compared to the way a man may give his experience, powers or influence to another



man. Because of this, while the Holy Spirit gives Himself to us perfectly at all times, as we grow and develop we are able to receive more, and we receive Him in a special way for special purposes. The newly converted man may receive the Holy Spirit—indeed, it is only by such a reception that he can be converted—but as he develops he becomes more open to the Spirit's influence, so that he may be said to receive a fresh gift at Confirmation. Again, if he is later called to the ministry, the Holy Spirit bestows fresh personal gifts for this new work. Each fresh gift does not mean any lack in what had gone before; rather it implies that what has been given was perfect, so that there are new duties and opportunities which bring us into even closer relationship with the Spirit.

By the indwelling of the Spirit in us our lives are raised above the limitations of this world of time and space to the sphere where God Himself is. Because we have the Spirit, our lives are 'hid with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3); already we possess eternal life.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Collect passages from the Old Testament referring to the Spirit of God.
2. What teaching about the Spirit is given in the Gospels?
3. Collect passages from the New Testament illustrating the work of the Holy Spirit as (a) the Comforter *i.e.*, helper, strengthener; (b) the Teacher.
4. Suggest examples from history or your own experience of men developing unexpected gifts by the power of the Holy Spirit.
5. Think out ways in which you believe the Holy Spirit has guided you. (N.B.—This question is useful for your own thought, but it may not be advisable to deal

with it publicly; rather it should be turned into a subject of thanksgiving to God.)

6. In 1 Cor. 13:8 St Paul says that certain gifts will cease. Do you think that we should not expect some gifts today which the Apostolic Church had? For example, what ought we to expect about the gift of healing? (N.B.—In considering this question it may not be possible to give a definite yes or no.)

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CHURCH

Gracious Father, we humbly beseech Thee for Thy Holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purge it; and where it is in error, direct it; where it is superstitious, rectify it; where anything is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen and confirm it; where it is in want, furnish it; where it is divided and rent asunder, make up the breaches of it, O Thou Holy One of Israel; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

—ARCHBISHOP LAUD

So far we have been thinking of our experience as Christians chiefly from the point of view of our own personal relation with God. That, however, is a one-sided view, for our sonship to God involves our relationship to the other members of the family, and it is only as we share in the life of the family that we can fully realise our sonship.

In the Old Testament God imparted His revelation and His gifts to men through the nation of Israel; indeed, it is only in the later part of that period that the personal side of religion is at all fully developed. While our Lord freely criticised the leaders of the Jewish religion of His time, He recognised their authority as 'sitting in Moses' seat' (Matt. 23:2), and always, as far as He was allowed, He joined in the institutional observances of Judaism, especially by joining in its feasts. He spoke of founding His own 'congregation', or 'ecclesia', or 'church' (the three words mean the same thing) (Matt. 16:18), and the greater part of His ministry was taken up with the training of the Twelve, who were to be the nucleus of His society. In Acts 1:3 we are told that between the Resurrection and the Ascension He was speaking to the disciples

'the things concerning the Kingdom of God'; and while we may not say anything more definite, at least it does suggest a definite organisation, and such an interpretation is justified by the history of the Christians which immediately follows.

All through the Acts it is taken for granted that anyone who believes in Christ is baptised and joins the fellowship. At the end of his speech on the day of Pentecost St Peter told the people, 'Repent and he baptised' (Acts 2:38). And immediately we read that 'they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship' (Acts 2:42). That attitude to the fellowship or the society is continued all through Acts.

St Paul develops the conception still further. He will not countenance any division in the fellowship, and when faced with the divisions at Corinth he told them they were dividing Christ (1 Cor. 1:13). It might have seemed easier to have allowed two societies or Churches, a Jewish one and a Gentile one, when the controversy about Judaism arose; but none of the Apostles ever thought of such a solution. The family of believers must be one, and however difficult the controversy, they had to preserve the unity of the Church by searching for the truth until they were agreed on it. St Paul says that the individual Christians are the separate members of a body, which needs all its members if it is to be healthy, and that in the body each member finds its function, though apart from the body it is almost useless (*cp.* Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:12 *ff.*; Eph. 4:16). In Col. 1:24 St Paul says: 'His body's sake, which is the Church'. The body is the instrument through which our personalities express themselves. The Church, then, is Christ's instrument through which He reveals Himself to the world and does His work, as He did through His body in the days of the Ministry. This is just what we find in our experience;

it is through Christian men that others are brought to the knowledge of Christ, and it is through other Christians we are enabled to develop. It is with all the saints that we are enabled to 'apprehend . . . and to know the love of Christ' (Eph. 3:18, 19).

We may notice further that it is only by the Church that most of the work may be done. However powerful, for example, an individual missionary may be, he needs the support of the Church for money, for helpers as the work develops, for the production of Bibles and other books, and still more he needs the support of prayer. Were he entirely alone, his effectiveness would be very greatly reduced. Equally in other matters Christ's work cannot be done by individuals, but only by the society. Had Christ not founded the society, the Christians would have been compelled to form it.

We are now bound to ask: 'What is the Church?' And we find that Christians give very different answers to the question. We should like to be content with the definition that it is 'the blessed company of all faithful Christians' (Prayer of Thanksgiving; Communion Office, B.C.P.), but that is not sufficient for practical needs; we need some outward signs. For our purpose we may take the answer given by representatives of the various denominations at the Lausanne Conference in 1927 (Report III):

'REPORT III: THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH.—God who has given us the Gospel for the salvation of the world has appointed His Church to witness by life and word to its redeeming power. The Church of the Living God is constituted by His own will, not by the will or consent or beliefs of men, whether as individuals or as societies, though He uses the will of men as His instrument. Of this Church Jesus Christ is the Head, the Holy Spirit its continuing life.

'The Church as the communion of believers in Christ Jesus is, according to the New Testament, the people of the New Covenant, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of God, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.

'The Church is God's chosen instrument by which Christ through the Holy Spirit reconciles men to God through faith, bringing their wills into subjection to His sovereignty, sanctifying them through the means of grace, and uniting them in love and service to be His witness and fellow-workers in the extension of His rule on earth until His Kingdom come in glory.

'As there is but one Christ, and one life in Him, and one Holy Spirit, who guides into all truth, so there is and can be but one Church, holy, catholic and apostolic.

'The Church on earth possesses certain characteristics whereby it can be known of men. These have been, since the days of the Apostles, at least the following:

'1. The possession and acknowledgment of the Word of God as given in Holy Scripture and interpreted by the Holy Spirit to the Church and to the individual.

'2. The profession of faith in God as He is incarnate and revealed in Christ.

'3. The acceptance of Christ's commission to preach the Gospel to every creature.

'4. The observance of the sacraments.

'5. A ministry for the pastoral office, the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments.

'6. A fellowship in prayer, in worship, in all the means of grace in the pursuit of holiness, and in the service of man'.

This would seem to exclude certain bodies which we cannot but regard as Christians; but that is perhaps inevitable if we are to have any really workable definition.

We have to admit that they are outside the visible Church, though that does not mean that they are not saved, or that Christ does not work in them; they are, however, outside the fellowship of the Catholic Church. But the Lausanne description also means that many bodies, which at present are not in communion with one another, are within the bounds of the Catholic Church. At present there is no Church which is fully Catholic, though some approach more nearly than others. Our duty is to be fully loyal to the branch of Church which we find nearest to the ideal and the purposes of Christ, and in that loyalty to work for a wider love with the other branches, so that the Church may indeed fulfil Christ's purpose.

In our Creeds there are four adjectives which are used of the Church which we should notice: 'One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church'. We declare our belief in the 'one' Church; we believe that God intended to work through a united Church, and it is that fellowship which rightly has a place in our Creed. It is not the Anglican, or the Presbyterian, or the Roman Church, but the one Church, as it is in the mind of God. We know the Church is divided, but we cannot believe that the separated Churches are in accordance with the mind of God. This article of our faith compels us to work and pray for the union of Christ's Church. But we should notice that all believers are in Christ, and therefore in Him there does already exist a unity; so our work is not really to produce a spiritual unity, but to give expression to that unity which already exists in Christ. As also we think of the greater part of Christ's Church, the Church at rest, we cannot but believe that there our differences have been transcended, and therefore the differences that we know only affect a comparatively small part of the Church.

Secondly, the Church is holy. The first meaning of 'holy' in almost all languages is 'set apart for divine pur-



poses', and always the word retains that meaning as its basis; thus we speak of the 'Holy Bible (Book)' or the 'Holy Table'. As, however, religious ideas develop it becomes clear that a necessary condition of any such dedication to divine uses must be moral goodness, where there is a possibility of moral values. A table in itself cannot be morally good or bad, but a man can; therefore, while the idea of holy in the phrase 'Holy Table' is confined to the idea of its being set apart for divine use, when we speak of the Holy Church or a holy man the idea of moral goodness must be uppermost, though the primary meaning is not forgotten. Again, we cannot say that the Church, as we know it here, is perfectly holy; the evil is ever mixed with the good, and there has been much in the history of the Church which has been far from holy. But once again we are declaring our belief in the purpose of God, and the Church in which we believe must be holy. We have to admit that this has not been fully realised; yet as we look at the history of the world we find that the Church has been a force making for holiness, and today it is still the Church which is giving the moral impetus to the forces working for the sanctifying of life.

Thirdly, the Church is catholic. We must not be afraid of that word and let it be narrowed by partisan use. There are two ideas contained in this word. First, the Church is for all men, of all races and of all ages. The Church in India, Africa or Europe is one; there will naturally be differences in the expression of the faith and worship, but it is the same fellowship. Just as there could be no thought of a different Church for Jews and Gentiles, there cannot be different Churches for men of different races or colours. The Church must embrace all, and transcend all differences; not, indeed, making all uniform in one pattern, but bringing a unity which includes all

differences. As the Church must be catholic, including all the different races of men all over the world, so it must also be catholic, including all the successive generations of men. The Church today is the same Church which has existed throughout the history of Christianity; we are one with the saints of all ages. Our work and lives are continuous with theirs, and theirs are completed in ours and in the work and lives of those who will come after. Just as it is necessary for Indians and Africans to bring their contribution into the Church of Christ, so too the Christians of the first century and those of the twentieth need the distinctive contribution of each other. The word 'catholic' has another important meaning: the Church must teach the whole of the faith, neither adding to it nor taking away from it. Most of our denominational differences are due to emphasising part of the truth to the exclusion of other sides, especially with regard to the position in the Gospel of the individual and the society; but the Catholic Church in the mind of God teaches the whole of the faith in due proportion. Again, the Church is not yet fully catholic, though it has been a force bringing men together. In order to make the Church Catholic, it is essential that we bring the scattered portions together.

The fourth adjective is 'Apostolic'. The Church is to be in continuity with the Church of the Apostles' time; it is the one Church coming down through the ages, proclaiming the same message. It is founded on the Apostles, and therefore we must judge any development by the light of the Apostolic teaching as it is recorded in the New Testament. There are, of course, developments and differences of expression. We cannot be just the same in all particulars, but it is the same Gospel which holds the Church together, and there can be no new essential in the method of salvation which was unknown to the Apostles.

The Church is not yet complete or perfect, but it is part of God's method of working in the world, and so is a vital part of the Gospel. It is through the Church that we reach the fulness of life, but as we develop we have our function in the Church, we have something to contribute to the life of the whole, that we may 'grow up in all things into Him, which is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fully framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love' (Eph. 4: 15, 16).

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How far has our Lord's teaching about the Kingdom of God any bearing on our idea of the Church?
2. Expand the paragraph about the Church in Acts, showing how the same idea runs through the whole book.
3. Show that the same idea of the Church is to be found in the other parts of the New Testament as is found in St Paul.
4. The Lausanne description of the Church as quoted leaves several points still doubtful. Suggest some of these. How would you answer the questions so raised?
5. There are many sincere Christians who have no real desire for the union of the Church, feeling that the smaller loyalties produce greater keenness in spiritual work. How would you answer this?
6. Why would a federation of independent Churches be an unsatisfactory substitute for a united Church?
7. Justify the statement that the Church has been a force making for holiness.

8. It has been said that it is better to have international denominational Churches than a number of purely national Churches. Discuss this.

9. Explain the idea of development, showing both its necessity and its dangers. How does the Church help to maintain true development?

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SACRAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

Two worlds are ours: 'tis only sin  
Forbids us to descry  
The mystic heaven and earth within,  
Plain as the sea and sky.

Thou who hast given me eyes to see  
And love this sight so fair,  
Give me a heart to find out Thee,  
And read Thee everywhere.

—JOHN KEBLE

WHENEVER we want to express any thought or feeling we have to use some material medium. Sometimes we use our bodies, as when we smile because we are pleased; sometimes we use some material outside ourselves, as now I am using paper on which I am putting black marks, by which you will understand my thoughts; or we use an action, as when two people meet and shake hands to show their friendship. Even when we talk we use our bodies and the air which is material. In this life the spiritual is always being expressed by material means. This fact we call the sacramental principle, and the means we call signs, symbols or sacraments.

Sometimes these sacraments or symbols are closely connected with the spiritual meaning expressed; at other times they only have a particular meaning when we have agreed upon it. Thus men everywhere recognise that a scowling face means that a man is angry; but two men who speak different languages would understand something quite different by the same sound, while to a third man who spoke another language still that same sound might mean

nothing. So we have to be sure that we understand these symbols or sacraments.

In many matters the value of a symbol or sacrament depends on the authority who issues it. For example, a note or coin of the realm is a symbol of wealth. A counterfeit note may have everything the genuine one has, and a counterfeit coin might even be more valuable intrinsically than the genuine one, but they have not the value of the true symbol because they are not issued by the proper authority; they are not, to use the technical word, valid.

We may reasonably expect this same method of expressing spiritual things through material ways to be found in our religion; indeed, we cannot avoid it. Sometimes people have said that we should try to have only a spiritual religion; but we are not only spirits, our spirits must express themselves through our bodies. If we read our Bibles or any other book we find a spiritual meaning through material things; if we use words in prayer or preaching we do the same thing. In fact, there is no expression of spiritual things in our lives without material means. Those Christians who have not used the Church's sacraments have had to invent others in order to express themselves. But in most of our Churches we find that there are special rites using this method which we call sacraments. We shall have to examine two of these sacraments in detail, but in this chapter we can consider some of the general principles.

First of all, if we are to use these sacraments aright we must understand them. If you were to give this book to a person who did not understand English it would be useless, except, perhaps, to light a fire with, or as a stand to put something on; but because you understand English you can learn something of my thoughts. For this reason, before we administer any of the Christian sacraments,

we require people to be instructed so that they can use them properly.<sup>1</sup>

But if we know the meaning of a sign we can misuse it. I may pretend to be your friend and give you all the signs of friendship, whereas in reality I am planning how to hurt you. So we may misuse the sacraments of God; we may say that we wish to serve Him, while all the time we do not care. Now, if we lie to God like this we only condemn ourselves, and we prevent ourselves from becoming like Him and being one with Him. For this reason we are warned of the danger of receiving the sacraments unworthily—that is to say, in an unworthy manner. We are not, of course, worthy to receive them, for we come to them because we know we need God's grace. But we must come worthily, which means we must use the sacraments as God intends them to be used.

The next point we can notice is that as we use these sacraments and signs our spiritual contact with others is actually strengthened. We increase our love for a friend by shaking hands or sharing a meal. So by the Sacraments our life in Christ grows and develops if we use them aright.

We must notice that there are certain ways in which we can use the language of sacraments and certain ways in which we may not. We can call the sign the thing it signifies, but we may not reverse the process; thus we may say of a map, 'That is England', but we must not say that England is a map. Secondly, we perform an action at a particular moment of time sacramentally, but the actual thing is independent of that time. There is, for example, a particular moment in the marriage service when the man says, 'With all my worldly goods I thee

<sup>1</sup> Baptism is administered to children, as explained on page 91, but only on the distinct and expressed understanding that the instruction is given as soon as possible.



endow', but that is one moment when he certainly does not do any actual bestowing of goods. In our interpretation of the sacramental language we must be careful that we do not misuse our terms.

We now come to an important point in understanding the sacraments, and we may quote from Report VI of the Lausanne Conference Reports: 'We hold that in the sacraments there is an outward sign and an inward grace, and that the sacraments are means of grace through which God works invisibly in us'. The primary meaning of the sacraments is that God gives us the outward sign by which we receive and are assured of His inward working in our souls. We must always think first of what God is doing for us and in us before we think of what we are doing. This means that we need to be assured that the sign is the sign which God appointed. That is the meaning of the word 'valid' as applied to the sacraments. 'To be valid', it should be noticed, is different from 'being efficacious'. To take an example. Sometime ago a 'bogus' clergyman in England solemnised a number of marriages. Because he had not really been ordained those marriages were not valid or legal before a special Act of Parliament was passed; but none of us would deny that the marriage services were efficacious—that is to say, that they did what they were intended to.<sup>1</sup> This distinction is important in understanding some of the questions raised in the discussions on Church Union.

Two considerations here call for notice. First, while the sacraments are effectual means of grace, God does give His grace through other means; and while we must not neglect any of the means, we must not think that

<sup>1</sup> This illustration must not be pressed beyond what is said here, for not only are the religious and legal aspects of marriage involved, but also the bride and the bridegroom are the 'ministers' of the sacrament and not the priest.

those who do not use any one of the means of grace are thereby excluded from the grace of God.

Secondly, the giving and receiving of the grace depends on the sacrament itself, and not on the personal character of the officiant. The minister is only the instrument through which God works, and God gives the assurance and the working of His grace in the sacrament no matter how unworthy the minister may be. This is the meaning of the technical phrase, so often misused, *ex opere operato*. But there are two necessary limits to the efficacy of a sacrament: First, the recipient must be in a position to receive the grace—that is to say, he must receive it by faith; only so can we receive the grace of God. And, secondly, it must be the intention of the participants to do what God intends. Thus, if an unbeliever imitates our sacraments for the purpose of mocking them, he may do everything required for a valid sacrament, but it cannot be valid, because it has not the right intention. Of course, this does not mean that a minister in baptising twenty people can intend to baptise ten and not the other ten. We may illustrate the meaning of this by imagining a judge taking part in a game in his house, and in the game sentencing someone to death. That sentence would not be valid or efficacious, because he was not intending to pronounce a lawful sentence. But when the judge is in the court he could not 'intend' to sentence one prisoner and not another.

Because it is important that we should be assured that the sign is the sign given by Christ, a clear distinction has been made between the sacraments instituted by Christ Himself and any other rites which have quite properly been used in the Church. So we acknowledge the two sacraments of the Gospel, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion; but we also use other rites, such as Marriage and Ordination, which we may rightly believe to be effectual means of grace.

These two sacraments of the Gospel are described in the Anglican formularies as 'generally necessary to salvation'. The word 'generally' here means 'for every Christian'. Not every Christian needs the special grace of Ordination or Marriage, and therefore those sacraments are not 'generally necessary'; but all should be baptised and all should receive the Holy Communion, and therefore we say that they are generally necessary. The word 'necessary' also causes difficulty. There are some Christians who do not use the sacraments. Are they, then, outside God's salvation? In stating our doctrine we are not passing judgment on others, but we are saying what is the truth of our faith; so we may leave the judgment of others to Him who alone can judge aright. If, however, we neglect any of the means of grace, we do so to the peril of our souls' health, which is the meaning of salvation. While we may be certain that God receives all who come to Him, and while we may and must thank God for all the proofs of His working in those who do not use the sacraments, we must admit that they have suffered through their not using such means of grace, just as we ourselves have suffered through neglecting other means. As we try to see what are the means by which God works His purpose in our lives we must insist on all the means which He has given us.

One of the uses of the sacraments is to help us in those times, which we all know, when it is not easy to realise our faith. At such times it is often difficult to draw much spiritual help from other means of grace, such as the Bible, because of our spiritual ill-health; but during those times we can hold on to the sacraments, assuring us that, whatever may be our state, God is still loving us and giving us the power and the grace we need. There have, indeed, been many who have thus found the sacraments a help in the times of spiritual weakness. Equally the sacra-

ments help us in times of strength, enabling us to receive yet fuller grace from God. From their nature they are simple enough for the humblest worshipper who comes in faith to receive help and inspiration, and yet they can equally help the most advanced believer.

Lastly, it is largely through the sacraments we realise our fellowship with the Church. The other means of grace are nearly always individual, but in the sacraments we depend on the fellowship of the Church, and by these sacraments the bond uniting the members of the Church is strengthened. For this reason those who emphasise the doctrine of the Church also emphasise the sacraments, and those who belittle the one also belittle the other.

In all our thoughts of the sacraments we can see three things bound up together: First, what we do, which is the least important; secondly, what the Church does in the expression of its fellowship; and, thirdly, the most important of all, what God does, in giving us His grace and assuring us of all His gifts.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Give other examples of sacramental expressions of feelings and ideas from your ordinary life.
2. Explain the difference between 'valid' and 'efficacious', with examples.
3. What is the difference between 'sacrament' and 'magic'?
4. In what ways can grace be conveyed or imparted?
5. Explain carefully what is meant by the unworthy reception of a sacrament.
6. Explain what is the function of faith in the reception of a sacrament.

## CHAPTER XIII

### HOLY BAPTISM

Grant, O God, that we who have been signed with the sign of the Cross, may not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue His faithful soldiers and servants unto our life's end.

—*Based on Baptism Service*

THE beginning of the Christian life in the fellowship of the Church is the rite of Baptism. Any society must have a definite sign which is the dividing line between the members and the non-members, even though some non-members receive some of its privileges, and to some extent share in its life before they become members. Thus a boy begins to share the life of a Scout troop before he is invested. So when adults are to be baptised there is usually a period of instruction before they are admitted into the fellowship of the Church, but during that period they share in the life of the Church, and most certainly share in the grace of God.

In the New Testament, as we have seen, belief in Christ was assumed to be accompanied by and expressed through Baptism. The institution is recorded in Matt. 28:19 and Mark 16:16. Although there are some scholars who would say that these passages reflect the usage of the later Church, the fact that the Church universally practised Baptism from the very beginning would make it extremely probable that Christ did institute Christian Baptism, and we may surely in this matter rely on the guiding of the Church by the Holy Spirit. St Paul, in writing to his converts, several times reminds them of the meaning of their Baptism.

Baptism is first an act of the candidate. It is the way he declares before God, the Church, and the world that he has accepted Christ and has determined to forsake the old life and live henceforth for Christ. Baptism is thus a badge which distinguishes the Christian from the outside world. In making this public profession of Christ the candidate is required to declare his belief in the Christian faith, to renounce all forms of evil, and to promise to follow God's holy will. This, then, is the candidate's share in the sacrament.

Secondly, it is the act of the Church welcoming the new member into its fellowship, praying for him to God that he may continue, and providing for his further instruction and training through the godparents who are responsible for watching over the candidate.

Thirdly, and most important of all, Baptism is the act of God. We baptise because we believe that God has told us to, and that in this sacrament God gives the sign of His grace. Through this sacrament God assures the candidate that He has received him, that He has made him a member of the Body of Christ, that He has given him the Kingdom of Heaven. God assures the candidate that He accepts him, forgives him all his sin, and will give him all the grace he needs for his life.

In this way Baptism both signifies and effects the transition from the old life to the new, the dying to the old and the rising to the new. In Baptism the Christian life has begun and God's grace is assured for its future development. In Baptism, therefore, the candidate is made a member of Christ's Body by an act of God to which he gives his consent, and therefore we may rightly say he is regenerate. While sacramentally we can point to an actual moment of time, as we saw in the last chapter, the spiritual reality is not to be thought of as necessarily taking place then. God gives us the seed of the new life, but we have

to work together with Him if that life is to grow and develop, otherwise it merely remains dormant. We may be certain that God fulfils His promises; if there is failure, it is ours in not using the grace He has given. In this matter, of course, as in all other such matters, the Church has to assume that the candidate is sincere and truthful.

We may notice, further, that Baptism has a representative meaning. We consecrate a Church, making it especially holy, in order that all places shall be holy; we hallow Sunday, making it a holy day, in order to sanctify all time. So also Christians are consecrated in Baptism in order to sanctify all men.

Very often a difficulty has been felt about the Baptism of infants who cannot understand enough to make any response to God. It is true that the New Testament gives no certain guidance in this matter, though the references to the Baptism of households would seem to suggest the practice (*cp.* Acts 16:33; 1 Cor. 1:16). The difficulty is caused through thinking too much of our side of Baptism and not enough of God's. While the infant is not able to make any response to God, God is able to give grace to the infant; and the Church has surely been right in finding an answer to any objection in Christ's blessing of the little children (Mark 10:13-16). While they could not give an adequate response to Him, we dare not suggest that His blessing was ineffectual. The children of Christian parents should be brought up in the full worship of the Church, and should learn the pledge and certainty of God's fatherly care and love as soon as they learn the care and love of their parents.

Baptism has usually been followed by Confirmation. Doctrinally, it is difficult to separate the two, and Confirmation must be regarded as a part of Baptism, though normally now it is deferred for several years. Practically it is useful for the imparting of further

instruction after Baptism, and it symbolises the candidate's becoming a full grown member of the Church. It can be interpreted in the same three ways as Baptism. As the candidate reaffirms his response to God in the light of fuller knowledge and experience, the Church welcomes him as a full responsible member, and God gives him the assurance of greater gifts of the Spirit to enable him to fulfil his greater responsibilities. It is to be noticed that the outward act in Confirmation, the laying on of the Bishop's hands, is the same as the outward sign in Ordination. The confirmed member has a priestly office in the world, just as the minister has a priestly office in the Church; he represents God to the world and the world to God. In this way the Church emphasises the priesthood of all believers.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. As we are usually taught that Baptism is a 'sacrament generally necessary to salvation', discuss the question of (a) the members of Christian bodies which do not use Baptism, and (b) an adherent of Christianity who is not allowed to be baptised because, for example, he is a minor.
2. Collect the references to Baptism in the New Testament.
3. What was the difference between the Baptism of John and Christian Baptism?
4. Show how the service of Holy Baptism brings out the three aspects of it as the act of the candidate, of the Church, and of God.
5. Examine the New Testament teaching about regeneration. See especially John 1:13; 3:1-15; Tit. 3:5.
6. Collect the passages in the New Testament referring to the laying on of hands on Christians after Baptism to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE HOLY COMMUNION

O God, who in a wonderful sacrament hast left unto us a memorial of Thy Passion, grant us so to venerate the sacred mysteries of Thy Body and Blood that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruits of Thy redemption, who livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

—*Early Roman Collect*

Holy Baptism is the sacrament of our entering into the Christian fellowship, and therefore is never repeated. But we need also a sacrament which shall express and nourish our life in the fellowship. This sacrament our Lord gave us at the Last Supper on the night of His betrayal. Ever since then Christians have observed this rite of the Breaking of the Bread, and in it have found strength for their spiritual life, the highest act of their worship, and the bond of their fellowship. But also, to our eternal shame, this sacrament has been the centre of some of our sharpest controversies. While, however, we differ on much, there is more on which we agree, and the agreement is on the essentials. As we approach this sacrament, concentrating on what we do believe, we shall find it to be more and more a means of grace for our souls; but if we think chiefly about what we do not believe, it is likely to become little more than a barren outward observance. In this chapter, therefore, let us try to build up a positive understanding of this rite.

We must begin by trying to understand the meaning of the Last Supper, though the full meaning of the sacrament can only be understood in the light of later experience. Begin by reading the account of the institution

in 1 Cor. 11:17-34; Mark 14:22-25; John 13. Whether the Last Supper was the actual Passover Feast, or whether, as seems more probable, it took place the night before, it is clearly connected with the Passover Feast. To the Jews of that time the Passover was a yearly remembrance of God's great deliverance of the people from Egypt, and of their entry into His covenant; it assured them of God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises, and it gave them fresh courage and power to remain loyal to Him in the face of every difficulty. The sacrificial lamb spoke of their union in the covenant and their relation to God. For these reasons our Lord desired to join in this Passover before He went out to suffer for the world's redemption, but it seems this was not to be. The grace of God is not confined to specific rites, so He took the bread and gave thanks and gave it to His disciples, saying: 'Take, eat; this is My body which is given for you'. He was, indeed, taking Himself and breaking Himself for men, when He allowed Judas and the chief priests to have their way, and gave Himself up to them. The sacrificial lamb had pointed to the imperfect relationship of men to God; by His sacrifice the perfect union was being effected. He Himself was the very Paschal Lamb. Likewise He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: 'Drink ye all of this, for this is My blood of the New Covenant, which is being shed for you and for many for the remission of sins'. He was giving His life—and blood always stands for life—that through it men might receive forgiveness and union with God. To understand the meaning of these words, notice that St Paul uses the phrase, 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood' (1 Cor. 11:25). Neither 'has become' nor 'represents' can be substituted for 'is', which word, however, must be understood sacramentally. Thus, by this dramatic act our Lord showed what He was doing.

Ever since Pentecost the Church has repeated this solemn act of Christ in obedience to His command. Its first meaning brings us back to that upper room. 'As often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come' (1 Cor. 11:26). As we celebrate the Lord's Supper we must think of the time when He instituted it, and we must remember the Lord's death. It is therefore the memorial of His death to ourselves; we constantly bring before our minds the fact that our faith and spiritual life is centred in the Cross of Christ, in His divine self-giving, in His sacrifice. It is the memorial before the world, and points equally clearly to the centre of our faith. We too easily forget that it is good for us to be reminded that the Cross of Christ is at the heart of our faith.

The Holy Communion is also the memorial of the Passion before God. In saying this we do not mean that God needs to be reminded, but we need to make the memorial and plead Christ's sacrifice before God. This is true of all prayer; it is not in order to remind God of our needs that we pray, but for our own sakes. As individuals we need constantly to plead Christ's sacrifice before God, and we must also do it as a Church, and not only for ourselves, but also for the whole world. All intercessory prayer is part of this work, and we especially perform it at the Holy Communion. This has always been regarded as the great time of intercession of the Church, and in its various ancient liturgies the great acts of intercession are an important feature.

As we thus make the memorial of Christ's sacrifice our hearts are surely filled with praise and thanksgiving for all that He has done, and so our thoughts are thankful ones. The service is not primarily supplicatory or intercessory, but is even more a 'sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving'. For this reason it is fittingly known as 'the Eucharist', which means 'the thanksgiving'.

So far we have been thinking of what we do—the memorial of the Passion which we make, but it is more important to see what God is doing. In the upper room Christ took the bread and the wine and gave it to His disciples, and still He takes the bread and the wine and gives them to us. To understand this we turn back to the great discourse in St John 6, where our Lord said: 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves' (verse 53). Eating and drinking are acts by which we take something apart from and outside ourselves, assimilate it, and make it part of ourselves. So our Lord was saying unless we take His manhood and His life into ourselves, so that they become one with ourselves, we can have no real life. This was so big a claim that it is not surprising that most of His hearers could not receive it, and 'walked no more with Him'. There is no need to suppose that they misunderstood Him and took the words literally. Any means by which we receive Christ's personality into ourselves is a very real eating the Flesh and drinking the Blood of the Son of man—whether it is by Bible study and meditation, by contemplating Nature, by seeing Him in our fellow-men, or in other ways. Sacramentally He gives us Himself pre-eminently in the Holy Communion. As we receive the sacred elements we feed on Him by faith, we receive His life into our souls, we 'receive the forgiveness of our sins and all other benefits of His passion'. Thus the service is the 'Holy Communion', the sacrament of our union with Him. By it 'our bodies are made clean by His Body, and our souls washed by His most precious Blood, that we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us'.

As we realise our union with Him we realise, too, our union in Him with all the other members of the Church, and so sharing in the one Bread and the one Cup we find the service to be the supreme act of fellowship in

the Church. First, we realise our fellowship with the immediate congregation, and in our experience we truly find an increase of fellowship with those with whom we share the sacrament. Then we realise our fellowship with the Church throughout the world as we think of Christians all over the world joining in this same sacrament, and being united with us in Christ. Thirdly, we realise our fellowship with the Church at rest. Those who have passed over to the other side are in Christ, and therefore by our union in Him we have our true union with them. In this sacrament we realise the unity of the whole Church in Christ, and 'with angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven, we laud and magnify God's glorious Name'.

Then, as we realise our union with Christ we are enabled to offer ourselves, both as individuals and as a Church, to God. Our sin would prevent our making any offering to God if left to ourselves, but as we are united in Him, and our lives are taken up into His, and He lives in us, we are able to share in His perfect offering, we can 'present ourselves, our souls and bodies, a living, reasonable and holy sacrifice unto God'. This is our part in the Eucharistic sacrifice. We offer to God in this service our faith, our penitence, our worship, our goods, but more than all, in virtue of our union with Christ, we offer ourselves. God, by giving Himself to us and for us, enables us to offer ourselves to Him.

As Christians have celebrated the Lord's Supper they have been especially conscious of Christ's presence and power in this service, but some of our sharpest controversies have arisen through attempts to define more precisely how that presence comes. This does not mean that Christ is absent at other times; rather His presence in the Eucharist is to enable us to realise His presence at every time and in every place. But He is present for a

special purpose. A person may be in the same room with us, and we may be almost unconscious of the fact, but when he begins to talk to us we are specially conscious of his presence. So most of us cannot be thinking of Christ's presence all the time and we need special times when we definitely concentrate our thoughts on His presence with us, so that we may be able to live continually in the atmosphere of His presence.

Many Christians have believed that presence to be closely connected with, or in, the sacred elements; the elements have been consecrated to be the sacrament of His Body and Blood, and therefore we cannot treat them as ordinary bread and wine. They have become something more, just as the cloth which has been sewn into a flag has become something more, and we must regard it in the same way as the country of which it is a sign. So the bread and wine receive a new value, and through them we may rightly realise the presence of Christ.

There are other Christians who think rather of Christ's presence throughout the whole service, giving us the sacred elements as He gave them to the disciples in the upper room; and this, too, is a right way of thinking of His presence, and it avoids a wrong localising of the presence. There is truth in both these ways of thinking of the presence, and they are not, as is often thought, mutually exclusive; rather, we are more likely to make a mistake if we forget or ignore either. Together they help us to realise the fulness of His presence, and to avoid the danger to which either view by itself might tend.

We can only perceive and use that presence by faith, but it is not our faith which creates the presence. Christ is present, but it is only as our faith sees Him that His presence has meaning for our souls. Christ's power was there to heal all who came, but it was only the woman who touched His garment in faith who received that

power; the crowd touched, but received nothing. Her faith did not create or produce or compel His power, but it enabled her to receive His gift. Our faith does not create or produce or compel Christ's presense. He gives Himself to us freely, but it is only by our faith that we can receive His gift. His gift is far greater than our faith. While in some senses it is true that He says, 'According to your faith be it unto you', we find also that in answer to our small faith He does far more than we can either ask or think.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Find any information you can about the Jewish customs of the Passover in our Lord's time.
2. Collect passages of the New Testament referring to the Holy Communion. Notice also other passages which use the language of the institution—*e.g.*, the feeding of the multitude, the appearance at Emmaus.
3. Explain the phrase, 'Our sinful bodies may be made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most precious Blood'.
4. What do you understand by 'the Communion of saints'? How far do we realise this article of our Creed in the Holy Communion?
5. Suggest what are the right and wrong ways of regarding the Holy Communion as a sacrifice.
6. Discuss the theories of transubstantiation and consubstantiation. Remember the meaning given to substance (page 19).

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

Almighty God, the Giver of all good gifts, who of Thy divine providence hast appointed divers orders in Thy Church: Give Thy grace, we humbly beseech Thee, to all those who are called to any office and administration in the same; and so replenish them with the truth of Thy doctrine and endue them with innocency of life, that they may faithfully serve before Thee to the glory of Thy great Name and the benefit of Thy Holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—*Book of Common Prayer*

ANY society must have its officials to carry out its work, and also to be responsible for everything which is done. An army must have its officers, a nation its government ministers, a club its executive officials. So, too, it is necessary for the Church to have its officers and ministers, and even when sometimes Churches have tried to do without them they have been compelled sooner or later to have some sort of ministry. In St Paul's conception of the Church the different members have different gifts and functions, and one of the gifts and functions within the Church is the ministry. But we must never make the mistake of supposing that the ministers are the Church.

One very important function of the ministry is to keep the unity of the Church. The outward sign of a schism in the Church is a separation of ministry, and it is through having the same ministry that the unity of Churches geographically far separated is largely realised. If, therefore, we are to recover the unity of the Church it is important that we have a ministry which is accepted and acknowledged by the whole Church. This is an extremely



difficult problem, but it inevitably takes a prominent place in all discussions on Church Union.

At the Lausanne Conference there were five propositions agreed to:

'1. The ministry is the gift of God through Christ to His Church, and is essential to the being and well-being of the Church.

'2. The ministry is perpetually authorised and made effective through Christ and His Spirit.

'3. The purpose of the ministry is to impart to men the saving and sanctifying benefits of Christ through pastoral service, the preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the sacraments, to be made effective by faith.

'4. The ministry is entrusted with the government and discipline of the Church in whole or in part.

'5. Men gifted for the work of the ministry, called by the Spirit and accepted by the Church, are commissioned through an act of Ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands to exercise the function of ministry'.

We should notice the agreement that the ministry is an essential part of the Church, that it is God who calls men to the ministry and empowers them for it, that the Church must recognise that call and authorise the minister through Ordination by the laying on of hands. But we find that there are different kinds of ministries, and the Churches are not fully prepared to accept the ministries of other Churches as valid—that is to say, as properly authorised—although they thankfully and gladly recognise them as efficacious—that is to say, they are ministries through which God has abundantly worked. As there has been so much disputing about this question we have to examine it a little further.

The New Testament records contain no definite and precise instructions from our Lord Himself about the

form of the ministry. But we know that He appointed the twelve Apostles, and that the early Church was centred upon them (*cp.* Acts 2:42, 4:32 to end). The appointment of Matthias in Acts 1:15 *ff.* really adds nothing to our knowledge. The next important step was the appointment of the Seven in Acts 6:1-6, (who are nowhere in Acts called deacons) in order to look after the money affairs, though they did also preach. It should be noticed that St Peter tells the Christians to choose the men, and the Apostles would appoint them. One of these Seven, Philip, later went to Samaria, where he baptised the converts, but the Apostles came down to lay their hands on them (Acts 8:14-17). The Apostles held the same sort of oversight over the Christians in other places—as, for example, over the Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:19 *ff.*). In Acts 13:1, 2 we hear of prophets and teachers, and the commissioning of Barnabas and Paul for their missionary work, though this is hardly to be taken as their Ordination. Then in 14:23 we find them appointing elders in every Church, though nothing more is said about the method. At the Council of Jerusalem there were gathered the Apostles and the elders (15:6), and James seems to have presided. In 20:17 St Paul calls the elders of Ephesus together, but in verse 28 he calls them bishops (overseers). The Epistle to the Philippians is addressed to 'the saints . . . with the bishops and deacons' (Phil. 1:1). In the Pastoral Epistles, bishops or elders and deacons are mentioned, and instructions are given for their selection.

As we try to gather this material together we find that there were first of all Apostles. This term includes more than the original twelve, who exercised a general jurisdiction over the Church, and St Paul, in the Pastoral Epistles, seems to delegate some of the Apostolic authority to Timothy and Titus. Then there was a local ministry

called either bishops or elders, who were over the Church in a particular place, and there were deacons to look after the financial affairs. There was also what is called the 'charismatic ministry', the prophets and certain others who exercised special gifts with which they had been endowed by the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to say precisely how this ministry was related to that of the presbyters and deacons. It seems that it was to some extent independent of the more organised ministry, though no doubt many of the presbyters and deacons had these special gifts. In so far as it was independent it very soon became quite separate from the organisation of the ministry, just as today there are many laymen who possess the same gifts, such as teaching or healing, but are quite separate from the organisation of the ministry, and do not in any way perform the special duties of the ministry.

The period after the Apostles is very obscure. In the Epistle of Clement about A.D. 96 there still seem to be two orders, the bishop-elders and the deacons; but in the Epistles of Ignatius (A.D. 110-117) we find the three orders of bishops, elders, and deacons, and he emphasises the necessity of preserving the unity of the Church by union with the bishops. After this, for fourteen hundred years the three orders were not questioned, nor was there a rival ministry.

How the transition from the New Testament period to the Episcopal ministry took place has been explained in two ways, and we have not really enough evidence to decide between them. The first theory is that the Apostles appointed men like Timothy and Titus to perform certain of their functions, especially the ordaining of ministers, and they in turn appointed their successors. According to this theory the bishops were appointed from above. The other theory is that in each place there was a college of elder-bishops, and one would naturally become

the leader or president, and so became the bishop, so that, according to this theory, the bishops emerged from below. At all events, the three orders did emerge, and we may surely claim that it was through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

At the Reformation a new situation arose. Probably few of the leaders of the Reformation had any doctrinal objection to Episcopacy, but many of them found that they could not reform the Church from within, as was done in the Anglican Church, so they were compelled to go outside the Church, and this meant the starting of new ministries. The Calvinistic Churches took the second explanation of the rise of Episcopacy, and said that the power and authority of the bishops really resided in the whole of the presbytery, and so, abolishing the Episcopalian system of government, they set up the Presbyterian.

We have seen that in a united Church a united ministry accepted and authorised by the whole Church is necessary. But at present there is no such ministry, and many would claim that in the divided Church there cannot be a completely valid ministry. Still the majority of Christians accept the historic Episcopate, and value it as expressing the continuity of the Church, and so we may claim that if there is to be a completely valid ministry it must be Episcopal, but we also need the other elements as well to make the Episcopal ministry completely valid. It is round the method of securing such a universally accepted ministry that the biggest difficulties of Church Union revolve.

The minister is set apart for his work by the service of Ordination, which includes the laying on of hands by the proper authority representing the Church. Ordination is at least sacramental in its nature, and has the same three aspects as all the sacraments. It is the candidate's declaration that he believes he has received the call of God

for the work of the ministry and that he has determined to dedicate himself entirely to that work. It is, secondly, the act of the Church recognising his call, and authorising him to exercise his ministry and praying for God's blessing on his ministry. It is, thirdly, the sacramental act of God assuring the candidate of further gifts of the Spirit to fulfil his ministry, and giving him the grace to do so.

While the ordained ministry is an essential part of the Church's life, we must remember that the duty of witnessing to God is the work of all Christians; while the minister has his function in the Church, all the members have theirs, and if the other members cannot perform the functions of the minister, neither can he theirs. Often, when people ask why the Church is not active about some matter, they are thinking of the clergy, whereas the matter is not one for the clergy, who probably have not the training or experience to deal with it, but for the Christian laity who have that training and experience. All of us, whether ministers or laymen, have a spiritual function to perform in the Church for Him 'that loveth us and loosed us from our sins by His blood; and He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father' (Rev. 1:5, 6).

3. What do you think is the teaching of the New Testament about the authority of the ministry (*a*) in teaching, (*b*) in discipline?

4. Explain the phrase 'the priesthood of the laity'.

5. Give examples of Church work which is not the duty of the ordained ministers as such.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BIBLE

Almighty and most merciful God, who hast given the Bible to be the revelation of Thy great love to man, and of Thy power and will to save him; grant that our study of it may not be made in vain by the callousness of our hearts, but that by it we may be confirmed in penitence, lifted to hope, made strong for service, and above all filled with the true knowledge of Thee and Thy Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

—SIR GEORGE ADAM SMITH

WE have seen that God had an eternal purpose for man before the foundation of the world, which was to be accomplished by Himself taking up manhood into the Godhead. That purpose was to be accomplished not merely by His action, however; it was to be through man's co-operation and man's will. In all God's dealings with man He will only work in and through man; He will never force man's will. Accordingly, that purpose was hindered, though certainly not defeated, by man's sin. In order, therefore, to fulfil His purpose of love, God had to train man to be ready for His supreme working in man—the Incarnation.

That preparation was made principally through one nation, which was to be a blessing to the world. At first Israel was very much like the surrounding nations; from very humble beginnings God trained it to be 'a light for the Gentiles' (Isa. 49:6). God prepared in that nation a series of men who were able to see a little further into the spiritual meaning of the world and of life, and so help their nation to understand more of the truth. These men thought very much as their contemporaries did, and it was no part of God's method to give them special

knowledge of the facts of science or history. He did, however, enable them to see more clearly into the spiritual meaning of the events of their times, and the significance of the lives of men.

Some of these men helped their people by being law-givers, or kings. Many of their laws were similar to the laws of the surrounding nations, and even depended on them, but we see that they were leading the people towards God. Their laws could not express the perfect standard of Christ, but they were nearer to God's will than the general ideas of their time. Others of these men were priests, and by the ritual and sacrifices of the Old Testament they taught truer ideas of God. Again, that ritual does not give the full revelation we have in Christ, and we express our religion in other ways, but it did enable the people of the time to draw nearer God, instead of dragging them back as so many pagan rituals have done. Then there were the great preachers or prophets who saw that God requires holiness, and that sin must in the end cause disaster both for the nation and the individual.

By all these men God taught the Jews more and more of Himself. It is true that their vision was partial and incomplete; even later St Paul says, 'We know in part, and we prophesy in part' (1 Cor. 13:9). We must not expect to find all the truth in the Old Testament; these writers themselves looked forward to something better, in which their knowledge of the truth would be completed or, as we say, fulfilled. But step by step they learnt and taught more and more about God until, at the end of the Old Testament, they had a very noble and inspiring religion indeed. But great as that religion was, it was not enough. 'For the law made nothing perfect' (Heb. 7:19). The Old Testament taught much about God and man, but it could not give man the power to live the life of holiness which God required.



At last that preparation was complete, and the world was ready for God's new revelation and for the new life which was made possible through that revelation; in the fulness of the time 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). He lived the human life which culminated through the Cross in the Resurrection and Ascension. In the life of Christ God has made the new creation, He has given life and power to men. At once the followers of Christ were endowed with special gifts of the Holy Spirit to proclaim to the world the good news of all that God had done.

The record of all this working out of God's purpose is contained in the Sacred Scriptures which we call the Bible. In those writings we see how through men of different types and characters God revealed Himself to men, and therefore we must always study those records if we are to understand the Christian revelation. Because God spoke to the men of their time through those writers, and because we have the fuller revelation in Christ, we can understand more fully the message given earlier; we are the better able to distinguish the eternal from what was merely temporary. All that was true in those old messages must for ever remain true because the spiritual world, like the physical world, is a world of order, and therefore the principles that were found true in the past must remain eternally true.

The truth of the Bible consists in its being true to the spiritual realities. It does not matter, for example, whether the prodigal son and his father ever actually existed in history: the story is a true picture of fatherhood. The question, then, we need to answer is, 'Is the Bible true to spiritual reality?' and not 'Is this or that statement in accordance with modern scientific or historical knowledge?' As we use the Bible to understand more about God we find in experience that the Bible is true in the only sense that really matters.

In trying to understand the Bible many difficult questions arise, which it is impossible to deal with in this book. We will find fewer difficulties if we do not make up our minds beforehand to say what God must have done, and then try to show that He did it. Rather let us try to see what He has done, and then form our theories. We must always remember that throughout the Bible God was working in and through men, never compelling their wills, but ever inspiring their souls, so that they were able to stand on the 'Godward' side of man.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. In the Old Testament we have the record of a progressive revelation. Show this progress (a) in the idea of God, (b) in the belief in the future life, (c) in the ideas about suffering.
2. Trace the development of the prophetic movement.
3. All prophecy is conditional. Illustrate this. (*Cp.* Jer. 18 and Jonah. Compare also the attitude of Jeremiah and Isaiah to the Temple.)
4. Give examples of the different kinds of methods God used for teaching men—by law, history, story, poetry, imagination, devotion.
5. 'Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me' (John 5:39). What does this suggest about the right and wrong use of Scripture?
6. Illustrate from the New Testament the fact that inspiration did not override the personalities of the writers.
7. What can you discover of the way in which the 'Canon' of Scripture was formed?
8. 'It is impossible to make a sharp distinction between inspired and uninspired literature'. Discuss this statement.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PRAYER

Be not afraid to pray—to pray is right.  
Pray, if thou canst, with hope; but ever pray,  
Though hope be weak, or sick with long delay;  
Pray in the darkness, if there be no light.

Far is the time, remote from human sight,  
When war and discord on the earth shall cease;  
Yet every prayer for universal peace  
Avails the blessed time to expedite.

Whate'er is good to wish, ask that of Heaven,  
Though it be what thou canst not hope to see;  
Pray to be perfect, though material heaven  
Forbid the spirit so on earth to be:  
But if for any wish thou dardest not pray,  
Then pray to God to cast that wish away.

—HARTLEY COLERIDGE

THE essence of the Christian life is that the believer is in constant fellowship with God, though probably few of us attain perfect fellowship in this life. This life of fellowship with God is the life of prayer, and we ought never to let our thought of prayer be confined to the actual saying of prayers. Our special times of conscious prayer are necessary if we are to live a life of prayer, but their value lies in their being the expression of our whole lives, just as the outward acts of ordinary friendship and family love are necessary for the maintenance of that love, but their value depends on their being the expression of our whole life.

Our prayer, then, is the conscious turning of our lives, our thoughts, our desires, our emotions, our wills to God. Just as we reveal these things to our friends, and if our

friends are worthy, the fact of sharing raises and purifies and enhances the value of those thoughts, desires, and emotions, and we gain power to do much we would really like to do, so as we open our hearts to God in prayer we are made more like Him and receive the strength of His life. This is the real meaning of our Lord's saying about praying 'in His Name'. The name stands for the character or the authority of a person. Compare the phrases 'He has a good name', or 'in the King's name'. Our prayers, then, are to be in His Name. We are to pray in His character and by His authority. That would mean that no selfish prayer can be described as being in His Name. It might seem at first that true prayer is then impossible, but we must remember that Christ through the Spirit is living in us; therefore as we let Him rule our hearts He prays in us and through us, as He does His other work in and through us. Further, while we must confess that selfishness does creep into much of what we do and are, part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to take our offering, poor as it may be, and to purge it of all that is worthless, and make it into the instrument of His power.

One of the greatest difficulties that most of us find in our prayer life is the fact that we so seldom feel the presence of God, even often at those times when we are most earnestly trying to seek Him. This problem is one that has tried the faith of many of the greatest saints, as, for example, the Psalmist says, 'Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face?' (Ps. 44:24). In prayer, as in all life, we have to walk by faith and not by sight, and there is nothing more dangerous than to try to rest our religion on our feelings. God chooses His own times for His revelation of Himself, and often those times come when we least expect them, but we will only see that revelation if we are prepared by constant prayer in faith. Part of the

reason why God does not always give us that consciousness of His presence is that our faith must rest on Him and not on ourselves; it is not by our wills that He comes, but by His. Still more, we cannot be consciously thinking of or feeling His presence all the time. As we go about our ordinary business we must concentrate on the matter in hand, and yet it is at those times that we most need to be able to recollect His presence. If always at the time of prayer we had a special feeling, it would be harder to realise His presence at other times. In this matter different people will have different experiences; some are more sensitive than others to certain 'atmospheres' or 'influences'. We must not try to force ourselves into the experience of others, but we must accept such experience as God gives us; and if we make the adventure of faith, we shall not be disappointed.

There is another difficulty which all of us feel at times. We pray prayers which are unanswered, in spite of all the promises of Scripture. It is not only our selfish prayers which are thus unanswered, but even prayers which we are certain are in accord with the will of God. In spite of all the earnest prayers for the world's peace, peace has not yet been attained; our prayers for a sick child seem in vain and the child dies; a mother's prayers for her son seem unavailing, and the boy ruins his life with sin. It is not easy to answer all these difficulties, but we may go some way to finding a solution. First we must remember that prayer is not a magic by which we can force God to do our wills, but rather the way we give ourselves that God may accomplish His will in and through us. Then, also, we must remember that God never forces men's wills, but our prayers do increase men's desire to do God's will, and our prayers for peace, we may well believe, are bringing the time nearer when war shall be no more.

Our faith is helped still more when we remember that the greatest saints have met this difficulty. St Paul tells us that he prayed that his 'thorn in the flesh' might be removed (2 Cor. 12:8), but his prayer was not granted, even though it seemed to him that his trouble was hindering his work. But God gave him the grace to endure it, and so enabled him to do an even greater work through it, for the fact that St Paul had such a disadvantage has encouraged many thousands since, and has inspired them to persevere in spite of their own difficulties.

Even more striking is the record of our Lord's own prayers. We are not told many of His actual prayers, so it is the more significant that three of those which are recorded were not answered. He prayed that St Peter's faith might not fail (Luke 22:32), and yet St Peter denied Him. He prayed that His Church might be one (John 17:21), and yet we know only too well its divisions. He prayed that 'this cup might pass away' from Him (Matt. 26:39), and yet He had to drain it to the dregs. But as we look more closely we see that His prayer did have its effect in the recovery of St Peter. His prayer is one of the most powerful forces today working for the union of the Church, and it was by His prayer in Gethsemane that He received the power to endure Calvary and to win that victory which was to save the world.

Our prayers do not always receive the answer we expect even when they are in accordance with the mind of Christ. But such apparently unanswered prayers are not ineffectual. We know not how, but we do find in experience that prayer is a force which God uses to fulfil His purposes. The greatest saints have known the difficulties of prayer in their most intense form, but they have also learnt its wonderful power.

This difficulty of unanswered prayer often takes an undue place in our thoughts because we have too narrow

a view of prayer. If prayer is the expression of the life of fellowship with God, the petitions and intercession are only a small part of what prayer should be. The listening side of prayer is more important than the speaking side. As we wait for God, He does transform us. Meditation and contemplation are two of the most important parts of the prayer life, though they are two of its parts which are most frequently neglected. Even on the speaking side what we ask for should only be a minor part; praise and thanksgiving should take a much more important place than they usually do. This chapter is not intended as a devotional guide, and therefore no more need be said here, though in the realisation of the fulness of our faith the sides of the prayer life mentioned in this paragraph need to be emphasised most of all.

All through this book we have been trying to understand the meaning of the Gospel in our own experience, 'that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself'. We have seen that the meaning of that reconciliation is the restoring and the deepening of our fellowship with God; the natural expression of that fellowship is the life lived in conscious union with Him which is the life of prayer.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Explain more fully the ideas in the first paragraph about the relation of life to the special times of prayer.
2. Show the place in the Christian life of public and private prayer.
3. At what times have you yourself been specially conscious of God's presence? How have those times been connected with your prayer life? (N.B.—This question is rather for private thought than for public discussion.)
4. How far ought our spiritual experiences to be different because of our different temperaments?

5. Explain the difference between Christian prayer and magic. How far can we expect our prayers to influence the lives of others?

6. The prayer life, like other forms of life, needs to develop. Show that this need for development explains much of our dissatisfaction with, and difficulties in, our experience of prayer.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### CONCLUSION

We yield Thee humble thanks, O heavenly Father, that Thou hast vouchsafed to call us to the knowledge of Thy grace, and to faith in Thee; increase this knowledge, and confirm this faith in us evermore. Give us Thy Holy Spirit, that, being born again and being made heirs of everlasting salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we may continue Thy servants and attain Thy promises; through the same Lord Jesus Christ Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the same Holy Spirit, everlastingly.

—*Book of Common Prayer*

WE have now reached the end of this study of our Christian experience, but we may well feel that we have hardly begun to understand it. As we dealt with each chapter we left much untouched, and what we have seen is only an introduction to further thought and meditation. The reader will, it is hoped, try to study some of the larger books to gain a fuller understanding; still more, he should try to see the meaning of the Gospel in his own life and the lives of others. It is as we learn to see a little more fully into the meaning of the New Testament, and to understand more of what Christ is doing for us and in us, that we shall all be able to give greater and wiser help to those whom we influence.

As we study further and as we discuss these matters with others, we shall find many differences and shall become involved in the controversies of the Church. We must try to think our way through these controversies, but we need to beware of merely barren argument. It is easy to lose the inspiration of the Spirit in useless arguments about religion. That is one of the subtlest

temptations that comes to a Christian. As we meet those controversies, we should try first to see what it is that we do believe, and that is the chief purpose of this book. If we concentrate on the positive side of our belief, we shall be surprised how deeply into spiritual matters we may go, and we shall find that the deeper we go, the more we reach the fundamental agreement. In the points on which we differ from others, we must try to see why the other people hold their view and what is the vision they see. Often those who differ from us have more to teach us than those with whom we agree.

We must always bear in mind that knowledge by itself is barren, and may even be a hindrance to the spiritual life. We must work out that knowledge in our lives. It is only as we obey the light that we have that we can receive fuller revelation from God. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead' (Luke 16:31). It is he who willeth to do the will of God who shall 'know of the doctrine' (John 7:17). Further knowledge can increase our communion with God and help us to fulfil His will better, but it must be wholly dedicated to Him. We must constantly offer our faith to God, praying Him to accept it, to reform it where it is wrong, and to give us grace to live it out in our lives to our own salvation and the salvation of those whose lives we influence.

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